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SATURDAY MARCH 13

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ALL-STORY WEEKLY



E. K. Means

What
Do You
Think?



Perley Poore Sheehan

The Ten Foot Chain

*A Symposium on the Problem
Can Love Stand the Shackles*

YES:

Achmed Abdullah
Max Brand

NO:

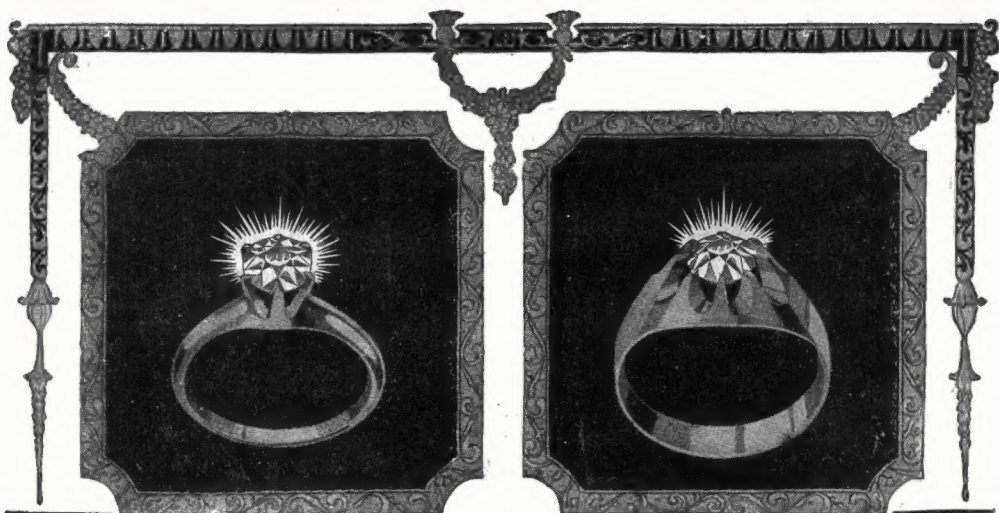
E. K. Means
P. P. Sheehan



Max Brand



Achmed Abdullah



Send the Coupon

No. 7A1410

This solid gold solitaire is the most popular ladies' ring in the world. Beautifully finished, the essence of good taste. Setting is a flashing Lachnite Gem weighing about one carat.

Price..... \$18.75
Deposit..... 4.75
Monthly..... 2.50

-we'll send you

a Lachnite

No. 7A1504

This solid gold ring is shaped and finished by hand. No finer or more fashionable ring could be made. It is set with a brilliant Lachnite Gem weighing about 3-4 carat.

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SEND NO MONEY. Just send us your name and address and we will send you, prepaid, on 10 days' trial, a genuine Lachnite Gem mounted in a solid gold ring. These sparkling gems have the eternal fire of diamonds. Their brilliance and hardness are guaranteed forever. We want you to select one of the rings from this advertisement and wear it ten full days at our expense. *Then, if you can tell it from a diamond, send it back.* Over 150,000 people have accepted this offer—and have found a way to own exquisite jewelry at a trifling cost.

Pay As You Wish

When the ring comes just make the first small deposit (\$4.75) with the postman. This is only a deposit. It is not a payment. The money is still yours. Put the ring on your finger and wear it everywhere for ten full days. Then if you decide to keep it, pay the balance at the rate of \$2.50 a month without interest. But if, during the trial, you decide to send the Lachnite back, your deposit will be refunded instantly. You run no risk.

Harold Lachman Co.

12 North Michigan Avenue
Dept. 1073 Chicago, Ill.

Send me prepaid Ladies' Ring on 10 days' free trial. When it comes I will deposit \$4.75 with the postman. After 10 days I will either return the ring or send you \$2.50 a month until the balance has been paid. Total cost to me, \$18.75. If I return the ring within 10 days you will refund me \$4.75 immediately. I enclose my finger size.

Name.....

Address.....

Send the Coupon!

Don't send us a penny. Just put your name and address in the coupon and tell us which ring you prefer. Be sure to send us your finger size. To get it cut a strip of paper that will just meet around the middle knuckle of your ring finger. Send the coupon now. You will be under no obligations to buy.

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Dept. 1073—CHICAGO

You hear the real Caruso

TO hear the real Caruso—to hear all the greatest artists of the world in your own home just as they want you to hear them, it is as necessary that you should have a Victrola as that you should have their Victor Records.

The Victrola and Victor Records are scientifically coordinated and synchronized in the processes of manufacture, making it necessary to use them *together* to achieve a perfect result.

Any Victor dealer will gladly play any music you wish to hear. Victrolas \$25 to \$1500. New Victor Records demonstrated at all dealers on the 1st of each month.

Victor Talking Machine Co.
Camden, N. J.



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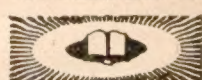
ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME CVIII

NUMBER 1



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10 Learn Public Speaking Lessons FREE

Write—quick—for particulars of this extraordinary offer; an opportunity you will never forget if you take advantage of it. Ten lessons in effective public speaking absolutely FREE to those who act promptly, to introduce our course in localities where it is not already known.

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How to tell entertaining stories.
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How to write better letters.
How to sell more goods.
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How to enlarge your vocabulary.
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Chicago, Ill.

I am interested in your course in Effective Public Speaking and your offer of 10 lessons free. Please send full particulars. This request places me under no obligation of any kind.

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Street
City..... State.....



Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rates in The Munsey Magazines:

Line Rate	
Munsey's Magazine	- \$1.50
THE ARGOSY COMB'	
The Argosy	} 2.00
All-Story Weekly	

Combination
Line Rate
\$3.50
Less 2% cash
discount

April 10th Argosy Combination Forms Close March 17th.

"A New Force In Business" is a booklet that tells how to advertise successfully in the Classified Department of the Munsey Magazines. Mailed anywhere on request.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

500 AGENTS WANTED AT ONCE for Mitchell's Magic Marvel Washing Compound. 300% profit; enormous repeats. Washes clothes spotlessly clean in ten to fifteen minutes. One thousand other uses in every home. Astounds and delights every woman. Nothing else like it. Nature's mightiest cleanser. Contains no lye, lime, acid or wax. Free samples furnished to boost sales. We positively guarantee the sale of every package. Exclusive territory. Own your own business. You cannot fail to make big money. Barber, Ohio, made \$600 last month. Send for free sample and proof. Hurry, hustle, grab this chance. L. Mitchell & Co., Desk 331, 1312-1314 E. 61st, Chicago.

AGENTS: Reversible Raincoat. Not sold in stores. Two coats in one. Something brand new. Saves the price of expensive overcoat. Guaranteed waterproof or money back. Big seller. Emil Thor made \$134 in one week. We manufacture and make to measure. No capital required. Sample furnished. Parker Mfg. Co., 606 Rue Street, Dayton, Ohio.

\$65.00 A WEEK AND YOUR SUIT FREE—IF YOU TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OUR STARTLING OFFER. Write us at once and we will send you a full line of samples and everything necessary to start at once, absolutely free, postage prepaid. Spencer Mead Company, Dept. 1193, Chicago.

AGENTS—WATERPROOF KITCHEN APRON. NEEDS NO LAUNDERING. Every housewife buys. Dainty, durable, economical. Big money. Sample free. Thomas Mfg. Company, 2107 North Street, Dayton, Ohio.

AGENTS—Make-Em-White Washing and Cleaning Tablets. regular gold mine for spring, profits enormous. Free sample; exclusive territory. B. Thayer, 2145R Clybourn Ave., Chicago.

AGENTS—STEADY INCOME. LARGE MANUFACTURER OF HANKERCHIEFS and Dress Goods, etc., wishes representative in each locality. Factory to consumer. Big profits, honest goods. Whole or spare time. Credit given. Send for particulars. Freeport Manufacturing Co., 38 Main Street, Brooklyn, N. Y.

AGENTS AND CREW MANAGERS. New fast selling food specialty. Livest, article. Packed your label. Write or wire, Federal Pure Food Co., 2305V Archer Ave., Chicago.

WE PAY \$200 MONTHLY SALARY and furnish rig and expenses to introduce guaranteed Poultry and Stock Powders. Higler Company, X 506, Springfield, Illinois.

AGENTS—OUR SOAP AND TOILET ARTICLE PLAN IS A WONDER. Get our Free Sample Case Offer. Ho-Ro-Co, 137 Locust, St. Louis, Mo.

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WE START YOU IN BUSINESS, furnishing everything. Men and women. \$30.00 to \$100.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. Ragsdale Co., Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

AGENTS—WITH EXPERIENCE. SELL TO CONSUMERS MADE-TO-MEASURE SUITS \$27.50, \$32.50, and \$37.50. Build independent business with big money. Outfits furnished. Midland Tailors, 511 Occidental Building, Chicago, Illinois.

SCIENCE CREATES NEW AUTO WONDER. Solves puzzling problem; no more rain or snow-blurred windshields. Mystic Cloth works like magic; deposits invisible chemical film; one rub keeps glass clear 24 hours. One agent sold 5,000. Security Mfg. Co., Dept. 193, Toledo, Ohio.

AGENTS—WE WANT REPRESENTATIVES TO SELL our exclusive line of Triangle Phonographs. Unique patented design, absolutely no competition as we are the only manufacturers. Sells at sight. Exclusive territory given. We ship C. O. D. Write for booklet A. The Marvel Co., 333 S. Dearborn St., Chicago.

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LAND! LAND! Make big money farming in Michigan. Best hardwood counties raising grasses, grains, stock truck and fruit. Only \$15 to \$35 per acre. Near schools, churches, markets, hardwoods, railroad, etc. Small down payment; balance easy terms. The biggest company, the lowest prices, the best land. What more can you ask? Write today for free booklet. Swigart Land Co., Y1245 First Natl. Bk. Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

BIGGEST MONEY-MAKER IN AMERICA. I want 100 men and women quick to take orders for raincoats, raincapcs and waterproof aprons. Thousands of orders waiting for you. \$2.00 an hour for spare time. McDonough made \$513.00 in one month; Nissen \$19.00 in three hours; Purviance \$207.00 in seven days. \$5,000 a year profit for eight average orders a day. No delivering or collecting. Beautiful coat free. No experience or capital required. Write quick for information. Comer Mfg. Co., Dept. Y123, Dayton, Ohio.

SALESMEN—CITY OR TRAVELING. Experience unnecessary. Send for list of lines and full particulars. Prepare in spare time to earn the big salaries—\$2,500 to \$10,000 a year. Employment services rendered Members. National Salesmen's Training Association, Dept. 133-C, Chicago, Ill.

LIVE WIRE AGENTS! WE WANT YOU! Take orders for The Liberty Line of Made-to-Measure combination Top-Coats, Raincoats and Automobile Coats. Hundreds of orders waiting for you. Our stock of materials is tremendous and deliveries are prompt. Complete selling outfit and sample coat free. Biggest commissions paid. We deliver and collect. Join our sales force of the biggest money-makers by writing for particulars at once. The Liberty Raincoat Company, Dept. 3C, Dayton, Ohio.

SALESMEN—Side or main line, to sell low-priced 5,000-mile guaranteed tires; 30x3 1/2 non-skid sells for \$11.95; other sizes in proportion. Good money-making proposition for live wires. Write Consolidated Tire Co., 618 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

SELL WHAT MILLIONS WANT. New, wonderful Liberty Portraits. Creates tremendous interest. Absolutely different; unique; enormous demand—30 hours' service. Liberal credit. Outfit and catalogue free. \$100 weekly profit easy. Consolidated Portrait Co., Dept. 22, 1036 W. Adams St., Chicago.

AGENTS: \$100 weekly possible introducing new winter automobile fuel. Specially adapted to cold weather. Starts easy. Adds power, mileage and reduces operating expense. Endorsed by thousands. Territory going like wildfire; Act quick. \$23 sample outfit free. L. Ballwey, Dept. 2, Louisville, Ky.

AGENTS—\$50 WEEKLY AND YOUR SPRING SUIT FREE. Sell our famous popular priced made-to-measure suits; big steady income guaranteed. Complete outfit free. Act quick. Commonwealth Tailors, Dept. 115, 318 West Washington Street, Chicago.

Mexican Diamonds Flash Like Genuine. fool experts, stand tests, yet sell for 1-50th the price. Few live Agents wanted to sell from handsome sample case. Big profits, pleasant work. Write today. Mexican Diamond Imp't. Co., Box 88, Las Cruces, N. Mexico.

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Insyde Tyres—Inner Armor for Auto Tyres. Doubles mileage, prevents 90% of all punctures and blowouts. Thousands in use. Tremendous demand. Big sales. Liberal profits. Details free. American Automobile Accessories Co., Dept. 165, Cincinnati, O.

SALES AGENTS WANTED IN EVERY COUNTY TO GIVE ALL OR SPARE TIME. Position worth \$750 to \$1500 yearly. We train the inexperienced. Novelty Cutlery Co., 77 Bar Street, Canton, Ohio.

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Classified Advertising Continued on Page 6.

In answering any advertisement on this page it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

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THOUSANDS of men everywhere are doing the same. Many are getting more than this. Some are opening garages of their own. Why don't you get into the auto game too? Men in other lines with a little mechanical ability have doubled their earnings after getting into the fascinating field of auto construction and repairing. Ten times the number of men now engaged in the business are needed. Fine, big paying jobs are waiting for men who "know" to fill them. Read below and find out how you can fit yourself to hold one of these big, man's size jobs in your spare time, without going away from home at a cost of only 7c a day.

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FREE Examination!

Mail the coupon for free examination. Don't send any money. We will ship the books (all 6 volumes) by express collect and you can have a whole week to use them as if they were your own. Give them every test you can think of. Take them to your shop. Show them to your friends and ship them back at our expense if you don't want to keep them. If you do keep the books to help you earn more, send us only \$2.50. You can send the balance of the \$22.50 price the same way—\$2.00 each month. Only 7 cents a day. This is your chance to double your earnings—earn two dollars in the same time it takes to get one now. The coupon is your start. MAIL IT TODAY.



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City.....State.....

Reference.....

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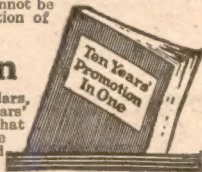
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Present Position.....

Address.....

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

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You, too, can have the position you want in the work of your choice, you can have the kind of a salary that will make possible money in the bank, a home of your own, the comforts and luxuries you would like your family to have. No matter what your age, your occupation or your means—you can do it!

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Explain, without obligating me, how I can qualify for the position, or in the subject, before which I mark X.

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| ☐ Telephone Work | ☐ Sign Painter |
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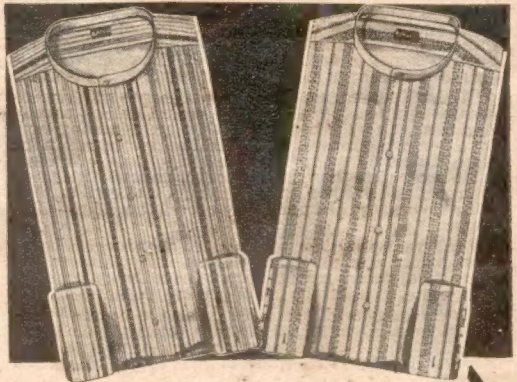
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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

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SATURDAY, MARCH 13, 1920



The Ten Foot Chain

SOME time ago the editor of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY was dining with the four distinguished writers whose pictures appear on the cover of this week's magazine. Needless to say where two or three authors are gathered together with a sympathetic editor in their midst, the flood-gates of fancy are opened wide.

In an inspired moment, Dr. Means tossed this "tremendous trifle" into the center of the table: "What mental and emotional reaction would a man and a woman undergo, linked together by a ten-foot chain, for three days and nights?" The query precipitated an uproar.

Captain Abdullah stepped into the arena at once, and with that elan of the heart, which is bred only in the Orient, declared if the man and the woman really loved one another, no chain could be riveted too close or too enduring to render onerous its existence. For through this world and the next, love would hold these twain in ever deeper and tenderer embrace.

Then the doctor, who claims he cuts nearer to the realities, insisted no emotion could bear such a physical impact. The reaction from such an imposed contact would leave love bereft of life, strangled in its own golden mesh. Max Brand begged to differ with both of his fellow craftsmen. With the cold detachment of a mind prepared to see all four sides of an object and with no personal animus of either prejudice or prepossession, Mr. Brand averred no blanket conclusion covered the case in question but in any given instance, the multiple factors of heredity, environment, habit, and temperament, would largely determine the final state of both the man and the woman.

Hereupon, Perley Poore Sheehan, the fourth member of the writing fraternity present, insisted on a hearing. Mr. Sheehan, nothing daunted by the naturally polygamous instincts of the male heart, insisted a good man, once in love, would and could discount the handicap of a ten-foot chain, since love was after all, as others have contended, not the whole of a man's life. To be sure it was an integral need, a recurrent appetite; the glamour and the glory, if you like, enfolding with its overshadowing wings his house of happiness. As for the woman—well, we will let Mr. Sheehan report, in person, his conviction as to the stability of her attachment.

The editor, whose business it is to keep an open mind, scarcely felt equal to the responsibility of passing judgment, where experts differed. But the discussion presented an opportunity which he felt called upon to develop. Therefore, each of the four authors was invited to present his conclusions in fiction form, the four stories to be published

under the general caption "The Ten-Foot Chain," in one issue of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. Herewith we are printing this unique symposium, one of the most original series ever presented to its readers by an American magazine.

Naturally, the stories are bound to provoke opinion and raise discussion. The thesis in the form presented by Dr. Means is quite novel, but the underlying problem of the stability of human affections, is as old as the heart of man. Wasn't it that prosaic but wise old poet, Alexander Pope, who compared our minds to our watches? "No two go just alike, yet each believes his own." We are certain you will be stimulated by these stories, and we invite an expression of your opinion.

What do you think of "THE TEN-FOOT CHAIN"?

FIRST TALE

AN INDIAN JATAKA

BY ACHMED ABDULLAH

This is the tale which Jehan Tugluk Khan, a wise man in Tartary, and milk brother to Ghengiz Khan, Emperor of the East and the North, and Captain-General of the Golden Horde, whispered to the Foolish Virgin who came to him, bringing the purple, spiked flower of the Kadam-tree as an offering, and begging him for a love potion with which to hold Haydar Khan, a young, red-faced warrior from the west who had ridden into camp, a song on his lips, a woman's breast scarf tied to his tufted bamboo-lance, a necklace of his slain foes' skulls strung about his massive chest, and sitting astride a white stallion whose mane was dyed crimson in sign of strife and whose dainty, dancing feet rang on the rose-red marble pavement of the emperor's courtyard like crystal bells in the wind of spring.

This is a tale of passion, and, by the same token, a tale of wisdom. For, in the yellow, placid lands east of the Urals and west of harsh, sneering Peking, it is babbled by the toothless old women who know life, that wisdom and desire are twin sisters rocked in the same cradle: one speaks while the other sings. They say that it is the wisdom of passion which makes eternal the instinct of love.

This is the tale of Vasantasena, the slave who was free in her own heart, and of Madusadan, a captain of horse, who plucked the white rose without fearing the thorns.

This, finally, is the tale of Vikramavati, King of Hindustan in the days of the Golden Age, when Surya, the Sun, warmed the fields without scorching; when Vanyu, the Wind, filled the air with the pollen of the many flowers without stripping the trees bare of leaves; when Varuna, Regent of Water, sang through the land without destroying the dykes or drowning the lowing cattle and the little naked children who played at the river's bank; when Prithwi, the Earth, sustained all and starved none; when Chandra, the Moon, was as bright and ripening as his elder brother, the Sun.

LET ALL THE WISE CHILDREN LISTEN TO MY JATAKA!

VASANTASENA was the girl's name, and she came to young King Vikramavati's court on the tenth day of the dark half of the month Bhadra. She came as befitted a slave captured in war, with her henna-stained feet bound together by a thin, golden chain, her white hands tied behind her back with ropes of pearls,

her slim young body covered with a silken robe of the sad hue of the tamala flower, in sign of mourning for Dharma, her father, the king of the south, who had fallen in battle beneath the steel-shod tusks of the war elephants.

She knelt before the peacock throne, and Vikramavati saw that her face was as beautiful as the moon on the fourteenth day, that her black locks were like female snakes, her waist like the waist of a she-lion, her arms like twin marble columns blue-veined, her skin like the sweetly scented champaka flower, and her breasts as the young tinduka fruit.

He looked into her eyes and saw that they were of a deep bronze color, gold flecked, and with pupils that were black and opaque—eyes that seemed to hold all the wisdom, all the secret mockery, the secret knowledge of womanhood—and his hand trembled, and he thought in his soul that the bountiful hand of Sravana, the God of Plenty, had been raised high in the western heaven at the hour of her birth.

"Remember the words of the Brahmin," grumbled Deo Singh, his old prime minister who had served his father before him and who was watching him anxiously, jealously. "'Woman is the greatest robber of all. For other robbers steal property which is spiritually worthless, such as gold and diamonds; while woman steals the best—a man's heart, and soul, and ambition, and strength.' Remember, furthermore, the words of—"

"Enough croakings for the day, Leaky-Tongue!" cut in Vikramavati, with the insolent rashness of his twenty-four years. "Go home to your withered beldame of a wife and pray with her before the altar of unborn children, and help her clean the household pots. This is the season when I speak of love!"

"Whose love—yours or the girl's?" smilingly asked Madusadan, captain of horse, a man ten years the king's senior, with a mocking, bitter eye, a great, crimson mouth, a crunching chest, massive, hairy arms, the honey of eloquence on his tongue, and a mind that was a deer in leaping, a cat in climbing. Men disliked him because they could not beat him in joust or tournament; and women feared him because the purity of his life, which was an open book, gave the lie to his red lips and the slow-eddy flame in his hooded, brown eyes. "Whose love, wise king?"

But the latter did not hear.

He dismissed the soldiers and ministers and courtiers with an impatient gesture, and stepped down from his peacock throne.

"Fool!" said Madusadan, as he looked through a slit in the curtain from an inner room and saw that the king was raising Vasantasena to her feet; saw, too, the derisive patience in her golden eyes.

"A fool—though a king versed in statecraft!" he whispered into the ear of Shivadevi, Vasantasena's shriveled, gnarled hill-nurse who had followed her mistress into captivity.

"Thee! A fool indeed!" cackled the old nurse as, side by side with the captain of horse, she listened to the tale of love the king was spreading before the slave girl's narrow, white feet, as Kama-Deva, the young God of Passion, spread the tale of his longing before Rati, his wife, with the voice of the cuckoo, the humming-bee in mating time, and the southern breeze laden with lotus.

"You came to me a slave captured among the crackling spears of battle," said Vikramavati, "and behold, it is I who am the slave. For your sake I would sin the many sins. For the sake of one of your precious eyelashes I would spit on the names of the gods and slaughter the holy cow. You are a light shining in a dark house. Your body is a garden of strange and glorious flowers which I gather in the gloom. I feel the savor and shade of your dim tresses, and I think of the home land where the hill-winds sweep.

"My love for you is as the soft sweetness of wild honey which the bees of the forest have gathered among the perfumed asoka flowers—sweet and warm, but with a

sharp after-taste to prick the tongue and set the body eternally longing. To hold you I would throw a noose around the far stars. I give you all I have, all I am, all I shall ever be, and it would not be the thousandth part of my love for you. See! My heart is a carpet for your little lisping feet. Step gently, child!"

Vasantasena replied never a word. With unwinking, opaque eyes, she stared beyond the king, at a slit in the curtain which separated the throne-room from the inner apartment. For through the embroidered folds of the brocade, a great, hairy, brown, high-veined hand was thrust, the broad thumb wagging mockingly, meaningly, like a shadow of fate.

And she remembered the huge star sapphire set in hammered silver that twinkled on the thumb like a cresset of passion. She remembered how that hand had plucked her from amidst the horses' trampling feet and the sword-rimmed wheels of the war-chariots as she crouched low above her father's body. She remembered the voice that had come to her, clear through the clamor and din of battle, the braying of the conches, the neighing of the stallions, the shrill, angry trumpeting of the elephants—

A voice sharp, compelling, bitter—

"Captive to my bow and spear, little flower, but a slave for the king, my master. For such is the law of Hind. He will love you—not being altogether a fool. But perhaps you will not love him. Being but a stammering virgin boy, perhaps he will heap your lap with all the treasures in the world. Being an honest gentleman, perhaps he will treat you with respect and tenderness, with the sweet fairness of the blessed gods. And perhaps—even then—you will not love him, little flower.

"Perhaps you will turn to the captain of horse as the moon rises like a bubble of passion from the deep red of the sunset. Perhaps you will read the meaning of the koel-bird's love-cry, the secret of the jessamine's scent, the sweet, throbbing, winglike call of all the unborn children in the heart and body and soul of Madusadan, captain of horse."

"A bold man, this captain of horse!" Vasantasena had smiled through her tears, through the savage clank of battle.

"A reckless man—yet a humble man, little flower. Reckless and humble as the moist spring monsoon that sweeps over the young shoots of bluish-white rice. For"—here he had put her in front of him, on the curve of the peaked, bossed saddle—"will the rice ripen to the touch of the savage, clamoring monsoon?"

And he had drawn slightly away from her. He had not even kissed her, though they were shielded from all the world by the folds of the great battle-flag that was stiff with gold, stiffer with darkening gore. In the fluttering heart of Vasantasena rose a great longing for this insolent warrior who spoke of love—and touched her not.

This is the tale of the grape that is never pressed, that never loses its sweetness, though white hands squeeze its pulp, day after day, night after night.

This is the tale of the book that is never read to the end, though eyes, moist and smarting with longing, read its pages till the candles gutter out in the gray dawn wind and the young sun sings its cosmic song out of the East, purple and golden.

This is the tale of love which rises like a mist of ineffable calm, then sweeps along on the red wings of eternal desire—the tale of love that is a chain forged of steel and scent, a chain of unbreakable steel mated to the pollen of the glistening areka-flower.

LET ALL THE WISE CHILDREN LISTEN TO MY JATAKA!

"SEE!" said Shivadevi, the old nurse, to Vasantasena, who shimmered among the green, silken cushions of her couch like a tiger-beetle in a nest of fresh leaves.

"Vikramavati, the king, has bowed low before you. He has removed from your hands and ankles the pearl and gold fetters. He has taken off your robe of mourning and has thrown about your shoulders a sari woven of moonbeams and running water. He has seated you beside him on the peacock throne, as a free woman—not a slave."

"Yes," replied Vasantasena. "He has placed his head and his heart on the sill of the door of love. He brought me his soul as an offering. And I"—she yawned—"I love him not."

"He has heaped your lap with many treasures," went on the old woman. "Jasper from the Punjab has he brought to you, rubies from Burma, turquoises from Thibet, star-sapphires and alexandrites from Ceylon, flawless emeralds from Afghanistan, white crystal from Malwa, onyx from Persia, amethyst from Tartary, green jade and white jade from Amoy, garnets from Bundelkhand, red corals from Socotra, chalcedon from Syria, malachite from Kafirstan, pearls from Ramesvaram, lapis lazuli from Jaffra, yellow diamonds from Poonah, black agate from Dynbulpoor!"

Vasantasena shrugged her slim shoulders disdainfully.

"Yes," she said. "He put the nightingale in a cage of gold and exclaimed: 'Behold, this is thy native land!' Then he opened the door—and the nightingale flew away to the green land, the free land, never regretting the golden cage."

"He grovels before you in the dust of humility. He says that his life is a blackened crucible of sin and vanity and regret, but that his love for you is the golden bead at the bottom of the crucible. He has given you freedom. He has given you friendship. He has given you tenderness and affection and respect."

"Yes," smiled Vasantasena. "He has given me his everything, his all. Without cavil, without stint. Freedom he has given me, keeping the bitter water of humility as his own portion. But all his generosity, his fairness, his humility, his decency all his love has not opened the inner door to the shrine of my heart. In the night he comes, with the flaming torches of his passion; but my heart is as cold as clay, as cold as freezing water when the snow wind booms down from the Himalayas. The madness of the storm and the waves is upon him, but there is no answering surge in the tide of my soul. In my heart he sees the world golden and white and flashing with laughter. In his heart I see the world grim and drab and haggard and seamed with tears. For—generous, fair, unstinting—he is also selfish and foolish, being a man unwise in the tortuous, glorious ways of love. Daily he tells me that I am the well of his love. But never does he ask me if his love is the stone of my contentment."

"Perhaps he does not dare," cackled the old nurse.

"Being modest?"

"Yes."

"Only the selfish are modest, caring naught for the answering spark in the heart of the loved one. And the love of woman is destroyed by humble selfishness as the religion of a Brahmin by serving kings, the milk of a cow by distant pasturage, and wealth by committing injustice. There is no worth in such wealth—nor in such love. This is Veda-truth."

And in a high, proud voice she added:

"I love Madusadan, captain of horse. I will kiss his red, mocking lips and bend to the thrill of his strong body. Pure he is to all the world, to all women—so the bazaar gossip says—but I, and I alone, shall light the lamp of passion in his heart. Free am I! But the unsung music in his heart shall be a loved fetter around mine. Clapsed in his arms, life and death shall unite in me in an unbreakable chain.

"I will bury my hands deep in the savage, tangled forest that is his soul and follow therein the many trails. I will read the message of his hooded, brown eyes, the trembling message of his great, hairy hands. His heart is a crimson malati-flower, and mine the tawny orchid spotted with purple that winds around its roots."

"Gray is the hair on his temples. He is the king's senior by ten years."

"Years of wisdom," laughed Vasantasena. "Years of waiting. Years of garnering strength."

"He is not as kindly as Vikramavati, nor as great, nor as generous."

"But he is wise—wise! He knows the heart of woman—the essence, the innermost secret of woman."

"And that is—"

"Patience in achieving. Strength in holding. Wisdom in—not demanding unless the woman offers and gives sign."

And she went out into the garden that stretched back of the palace in wild, scented profusion, bunching its majestic, columnar aisles of banyan figs as a foil for the dainty, pale green tracery of the nim-trees, the quivering, crimson domes of the peepals bearded to the waist with grey and orange moss, where the little, bold-eye gekko lizards slipped like narrow, green flags through the golden, perfumed fretwork of the chandela bushes and wild parrots screeched overhead with burnished wings; and there she met Madusadan, captain of horse, whom she had summoned by a scribbled note earlier in the day, and her veil slipped, and her white feet were like trembling flowers, and she pressed her red mouth on his and rested in his arms like a tired child.

The road of desire runs beneath the feet all day and all night, says the tale. There is no beginning to this road, nor end. Out of the nowhere it comes, vanishing, yet never vanishing in the nowhere; renewing each morning, after nights of love, the eternal miracle, the never-ending virginity of passion.

You cannot end the endless chain of it, says the tale. You cannot hush the murmur of the sea which fills the air, rising to the white, beckoning finger of Chandra, the Moon.

Love's play is worship.

Love's achievement is a rite.

Love's secret is never read.

Always around the corner is another light, a new light—golden, twinkling, mocking, like the will-o'-the-wisp.

Reach to it—as you never will—and there is the end of the chain, the end of the tale.

LET ALL THE WISE CHILDREN LISTEN TO MY JATAKA!

"You broke your faith, faithless woman!" said Vikramavati as he saw Vasantasena in the arms of Madusadan, captain of horse.

The girl smiled.

"It was you who spoke of love," she replied, "not I."

"I tried to conquer your love by the greatness of my own love."

"As a fool tries to take out a thorn in his foot by a thorn in his hand."

"I gave you freedom. I gave you the wealth of all Hindustan, the wealth of the outer lands. I gave you my soul, my heart, my body, my strength, my ambition, my faith, my secret self."

"You gave me everything—because you love me. I gave you nothing—because I do not love you."

"Love can do the impossible," gravely said the captain of horse, while Vasantasena nestled more closely in his arms. "It was because of love that Vishnu, the Creator, changed into a dwarf and descended to the lowermost regions, and there captured Bali, the Raja of Heaven and of Earth. It was because of love that, as

Ramachandra, helped by the monkey folk, he built a bridge between India and Ceylon, and that, as Krishna, he lifted up the great mountain Golondghan in the palm of his hand as an umbrella with which to shield his loved one against the splintering, merciless rays of Surya, the Sun, the jealous, yellow god.

"Love can do all things—except one. For love can never create love, wise king. Love can force the stream to flow up-hill, but it cannot create the stream when there is no water."

Silence dropped like a shadow of fate, and Vikramavati turned slowly and walked toward the palace.

"To-morrow," he said over his shoulder, in an even, passionless voice, "you shall die a death of lingering agony."

Madusadan laughed lightly.

"There is neither to-day nor to-morrow nor yesterday for those who love," he replied. "There is only the pigeon-blue of the sunlit sky, the crimson and gold of the harvest-fields, the laughter of the far waters. Love fills the cup of infinity."

"To-morrow you will be dead," the king repeated dully.

And again Madusadan laughed lightly.

"And what then, O wise king, trained in the rigid logic of Brahmin and Parohitas?" he asked. "Will our death do away with the fact that once we lived and, living, loved each other? Will the scarlet of our death wipe out the streaked gray of your jealousy? Will our death give you the love of Vasantasena, which never was yours in life? Will our death rob our souls of the memory of the great sweetness which was ours, the beauty, the glory, the never-ending thrill of fulfilment?"

"Love ceases with death."

"Love, wise king, is unswayed by the rhythm of either life—or death. Love—that surges day after day, night after night, as year after year the breast of the earth heaves to the spring song of the ripening rice, to the golden fruit of the mango groves.

"Death? A fig for it, wise king!

"Let me but live until to-morrow in the arms of my loved one, and the sweetness of our love shall be an unbreakable chain—on through a thousand deaths, a thousand new births, straight into Nirvāna—into Brahm's silver soul!"

"Ahee!" echoed Vasantasena. "Let death come and the wind of life lull; let the light fail and the flowers wilt and droop; let the stars gutter out one by one and the cosmos crumble in the gray storm of final oblivion—yet will our love be an unbreakable chain, defying you, O king—defying the world—defying the very gods—"

"But not defying the laws of nature, as interpreted by a wise Brahmin!" a shrill, age cracked voice broke in, and Deo Singh, the old prime minister who had come down the garden trail on silent, slippered feet, stepped into the open.

"No! By Shiva and by Shiva! Not the laws of nature, the eternal laws of logic, as interpreted by a priest well versed in Sruti and Smriti—in revelation and tradition. Not the laws of nature, rational and evidential, physical and metaphysical, analytical and synthetical, philosophical and philological, as expounded by a Parohita familiar with the Vedas and the blessed wisdom of the ancient Upanishads of Hind!"

He salaamed low before Vikramavati.

"It is written in the Bhagavad Gita, the Book of Books, the Lay of Brahm the Lord, that each crime shall find condign punishment, be it committed by high caste or low caste, by prince or peasant, by raja or ryot. To each his punishment, says the Karma, which is fate!"

"And—these two?" demanded Vikramavati. "What punishment shall be meted out to the faithless woman and the faithless captain of horse, Brahmin?"

Deo Singh spread out his fingers like the sticks of a fan.

"They have chosen their own sentence, these worshippers of Kartikeya, God of

Rogues and Rascals," he chuckled. "Of a chain they spoke. An unbreakable chain that defies all laws, except belike"—again he laughed deep in his throat—"the wise laws of nature. Weld them together with such a chain, forged by a master smith, made so strong that not even a tough-thewed captain of horse may break it with the clouting muscles of his arms and back. A chain, ten feet long, so that they may never be far away from each other, so that they may always be able to slake the hot, turbulent thirst of love, so that they may never have to wait for the thrill of fulfilment as a beggar waits at life's feast. so that day and night, each hour, each minute, each second they may revel in the sunshine of their love, so that never they may have to stand helpless before the flood-tide of their desire.

"Grant them their wish, O king, being wise and merciful; and then lock them into a room containing the choicest food, the sweetest drinks, the whitest flowers, the softest, silkenest couch draped with purple and gold. A room such as lovers dream of—and fools! Leave them there together for three days, three nights, three sobbing, crunching, killing eternities! With no sound, no touch, no scent, no taste, but their own voices, their own hearts and souls and minds and bodies! And at the end of the three days—"

"Yes?" asked Vikramavati.

"They will have suffered the worst punishment, the worst agony on earth. Slowly, slowly for three days, three nights, three eternities, they will have watched the honey of their love turn, drop by drop, into gall. Their passion—slowly, slowly—will turn into loathing; their desire into disgust. For no love in the world can survive the chain of monotony!"

THUS it was done.

A chain of unbreakable steel, ten feet long, was welded to the girl's right wrist and the man's left, and they were locked into a house—a house such as lovers dream of—that was guarded day and night by armed warriors, who let none within hailing distance, whose windows were shuttered and curtained so that not even the golden eye of the sun might look in, and around which a vast circular clearing had been made with torch and spade and scimitar so that neither bird nor insect nor beast of forest and jungle might live there and no sound drift into the lovers' room except, perhaps, the crooning sob of the dawn wind; and at the end of the third night carefully, stealthily, silently the king and the Brahmin walked up to the house and pressed their ears against the keyhole, and they heard the man's voice saying:

"I love you, little flower of my happiness! I love you—you who are all my dreams come true! When I look into your face the sun rises, and the waters bring the call of the deep, and the boat of my life rocks on the dancing waves of passion!"

And then the girl's answer, clear, serene:

"And I love you, Madusadan, captain of horse! You have broken the fetters of my loneliness, the shackles of my longing! I waited, waited, waited—but you came, and I shall never let you go again! You have banished all the drab, sad dreams of the past! You have made your heart a prison for my love, and you have tossed away the key into the turbulent whirlpool of my eternal desire!"

"Did the chain gall them?" asked the Foolish Virgin, who had come to Jehan Tugluk Khan, a wise man in Tartary and milk brother to Ghengiz Khan, Emperor of the East and the North and Captain-General of the Golden Horde.

"No, Foolish Virgin," replied Jehan Tugluk Khan. "Their love could

not have lived without the chain. It was their love which WAS the chain—made it, held it, welded it, eternal, unbreaking, unbreakable. Ten feet long was the chain. Each foot of steel—eternal, unbreaking, unbreakable—was a link of their love, and these links were: Passion, patience, completion, friendship, tolerance, understanding, tenderness, forgiveness, service, humor."

This is the end of the tale of Vasantasena, the slave who was free in her own heart, and of Madusadan, a captain of horse, who plucked the white rose without fearing the thorns.

And, says the tale, if you would make your chain doubly unbreakable, add another foot to it, another link. There is no word for it. But, by the strength and sense of it, you must never lull your love to sleep in the soft cradle of too great security.

For love demands eternal vigilance.

LISTEN, O AZIZA, O BELOVED, TO MY JATAKA!

SECOND TALE

OUT OF THE DARK

BY MAX BRAND

THE principality of Pornia is not a large country and in the ordinary course of history it should have been swallowed entire, centuries ago, by one of the kingdoms which surround it. Its situation has saved it from this fate, for it is the buffer state between two great monarchies whose jealousy has preserved for Pornia an independent existence.

Despite its independence, Pornia has never received much consideration from the rest of Europe, and the aim of its princes for many generations has been to foist it into the great councils by a strong alliance with one of the two kingdoms to which it serves as a buffer.

The long-desired opportunity came at last in the reign of Alexander VI, who, one morning, commanded Rudolph of Herzvina to appear at the palace. As soon as the worthy old baron appeared, Alexander spoke to him as follows: "Rudolph, you are an old and respected counselor, a devoted servant of the state, and therefore I am delighted to announce that the greatest honor is about to descend upon your family, an honor so great that the entire state of Pornia will be elevated thereby. The Crown Prince Charles wishes to make your daughter his wife!"

At this he stepped back, the better to note the joy with which old Rudolph would receive this announcement, but, to his astonishment, the baron merely bowed his head and sighed.

"Your highness," said Rudolph of Herzvina, "I have long known of the attachment which the crown prince has for my daughter, Bertha, but I fear that the marriage can never be consummated."

"Come, come!" said the prince genially. "It is a far leap indeed from Baron of Herzvina to father-in-law to Prince Charles, but there have been stranger things in history than this, though never anything that could so effectually elevate Pornia. Have no fear of Charles. He loves your daughter; he is strong-minded as the very devil; he will override any opposition from his father. As a matter of fact, it is no

secret that Charles is already practically the ruler over his kingdom. So rejoice, Herzvina, and I will rejoice with you!"

But the baron merely shook his head sadly and repeated: "I fear the marriage can never be consummated."

"Why not?" said the prince in some heat. "I tell you, his royal highness loves the girl. I could read passion even in the stilted language of his ambassador's message. Why not?"

"I was not thinking of his royal highness, but of the girl. She will not marry him."

The prince dropped into a chair with jarring suddenness.

Rudolph continued hastily: "I have talked with Bertha many times and seriously of the matter; I have tried to convince her of her duty; but she will not hear me. The foolish girl says she does not love his highness."

The prince smote his hands together in an ecstasy of impatience.

"Love! Love! In the name of God, Herzvina, what has love to do with this? This is the thing for which Pornia has waited during centuries. Through this alliance I can make a treaty that will place Pornia once and forever upon the map of the diplomatic powers. Love!"

"I have said all this to her, but she is obdurate."

"Does she expect some fairy prince? She is not a child; she is not even—forgive me—beautiful."

"True. She is not even pretty, but even homely women, your highness, will sometimes think of love. It is a weakness of the sex."

He was not satirical; he was very earnest indeed. He continued: "I have tried every persuasion. She only says in reply: 'He is too old. I cannot love him.'"

An inspiration came to Alexander of Pornia. Under the stress of it he rose and so far forgot himself as to clap a hand upon the shoulder of Herzvina. In so doing he had to reach up almost as high as his head, for the princes of Pornia have been small men time out of mind.

"Baron," he said, "will you let me try my hand at persuasion?"

"It would be an honor, sire. My family is ever at the disposal of my prince."

He answered with a touch of emotion: "I know it, Rudolph; but will you trust the girl in my hands for a number of days? A thought has come to me. I know I can convince her that this love of which she dreams is a thing of the flesh alone, a physical necessity. Come, send her to me, and I shall tear away her illusions. She will not thank me for it, but she will marry the crown prince."

"I will send her to the palace to-day."

"Very good; and first tell her why I wish to speak with her. It may be that of herself she will change her mind when she learns the wishes of her prince. Farewell."

And the prince rode off to a review of the troops of the city guard. So it was that Bertha of Herzvina sat for a long time in a lonely room, after her arrival at the palace before the door opened, a man in livery bowed for the entrance of the prince, and she found herself alone with her sovereign.

Automatically she curtsied, and he let her remain bowed while he slowly drew off his white gloves. He still wore his general's uniform with the stiff padding which would not allow his body to grow old, for a prince of Pornia must always look the soldier.

"Sit down," he ordered, and as she obeyed he commenced to walk the room.

He never sat quietly through an interview if he could avoid it; a constitutional weakness of the nerves made it almost impossible for him to meet another person's eyes. The pacing up and down gave a plausible reason for the continual shifting of his glance.

"A good day, a very good day," he said. "The hussars were wonderful."

His shoulders strained further back. The prince himself always rode at the head of the hussars; in her childhood she had admired him. He stopped at a window and hummed a marching air. That was a planned maneuver, for his back was far more royal than his face, with its tall forehead and diminutive mouth and chin. She felt as if she were in the presence of a uniformed automaton.

He broke off his humming and spoke without turning.

"Well?"

"My decision is unchanged."

"Impossible! In the length of a whole day even a woman must think twice."

"Yes, many times."

"You will not marry him?"

"I cannot love him."

He whirled, and the pale blue eyes flashed at her a brief glance which made her cringe. It was as if an X-ray had been turned on her heart.

"Love!" he said softly, and she shuddered again. "Because he is old? Bertha, you are no longer a child. Other women marry for what they may term love. It is your privilege to marry for the state. That is the nobler thing."

He smiled and nodded, repeating for his own ear: "The nobler thing! What is greater than such service—what is more glorious than to forget self and marry for the good of the thousands?"

"I have an obligation to myself."

"Who has filled you with so many childish ideas?"

"They have grown of themselves, sire."

The pacing up and down the room recommenced. "Child, have you no desire to serve me? I mean, your country?"

She answered slowly, as if feeling for her words: "It is impossible that I should be able to serve you through my dishonor. If I should marry the crown prince, my life would be one long sleep, sire. I would not dare awaken to the reality."

His head tilted and he laughed noiselessly. A weakness of the throat prevented him from raising his voice even in times of the greatest excitement.

"A soul that sleeps, eh? The kiss of love will awaken it?"

He surveyed her with brief disdain.

"My dear, you scorn titles, and yet as an untitled woman you are not a match for the first red-faced tradesman's daughter. Stand up!"

She rose and he led her in front of a pier glass. Solemnly he studied her pale image.

"A sleeping soul!" he repeated.

She covered her face.

"Will that bait catch the errant lover, Bertha?"

"God will make up the difference."

He cursed softly. She had not known he could be so moved.

"Poor child, let me talk with you."

He led her back to a chair almost with kindness and sat somewhat behind her so that he need not meet her eyes.

"This love you wait for—it is not a full-grown god, dear girl, but a blind child. Given a man and a woman and a certain propinquity, and nature does the rest. We put a mask on nature and call it love, we name an abstraction and call it God. Love! Love! Love! It is a pretty disguise—no more. Do you understand?"

"I will not."

She listened to his quick breathing.

"Bertha, if I were to chain you with a ten-foot chain to the first man off the streets and leave you alone with him for three days, what would happen?"

Her hand closed on the arm of the chair. He rose and paced the room as his idea grew.

"Your eyes would criticise him and your shame would fight in behalf of your—soul? And the sight of your shame would keep the man in check. But suppose the room were dark—suppose you could not see his face and merely knew that a man was there—suppose *he* could not see and merely knew that a woman was there? What would happen? Would it be love? Pah! Love is no more deified than hunger. If it is satisfied, it goes to sleep; if it is satiated, it turns to loathing. Aye, at the end of the three days you would be glad enough to have the ten-foot chain cut. But first what would happen?"

The vague terror grew coldly in her, for she could see the idea taking hold of him like a hand.

"If I were to do this, the world might term it a shameful thing, but I act for Pornia—not for myself. I consider only the good of the state. By this experiment I prove to you that love is not God, but blind nature. Yes, and if you knew it as it is, would you oppose me longer? The thought grows upon me! Speak!"

Her smile made her almost beautiful.

"Sire, in all the world there is only one man for every woman."

"Book talk."

He set his teeth because he could not meet her eyes.

"And who will bring you this one man?"

"God."

Once more the soundless laugh.

"Then I shall play the part of God. Bertha, you must now make your decision: a marriage for the good of the state, or the ten-foot chain, the dark room—and love!"

"Even you will not dare this, sire."

"Bertha, there is nothing I do not dare. What would be known? I give orders that this room be utterly darkened; I send secret police to seize a man from the city at random and fetter him to a chain in that room; then I bring you to the room and fasten you to the other end of the chain, and for three days I have food introduced into the room. Results? For the man, death; for you, a knowledge first of yourself and, secondly, of love. The state will benefit."

"It is bestial—incredible."

"Bestial? Tut! I play the part of God and even surpass Him. I put you face to face with a temptation through which you shall come to know yourself. You lose a dream; you gain a fact. It is well. Shame will guard the secret in your heart and the state will benefit. Still you see that I am paternal—merciful. I do not punish you for your past obstinacy. I still give you a choice. Bertha, will you marry as I wish, or will you force me to play the part of God?"

"I shall not marry."

"Ah, you will wait for God to make up the difference. It is well—very well; *le Dieu c'est moi*. Ha! That is greater than the phrase of Louis XIV. You shall have still more time, but the moment the sun goes down, if I do not hear from you, I shall ring a bell that will send my secret police out to seize a man indiscriminately from the masses of the city. I shall not even stipulate that he be young. My trust in nature is—absolute. *Adieu!*"

She made up her mind the moment he left the room. She drew on her cloak. Before the pier glass she paused.

"Aye," she murmured, "I could not match the first farmer's daughter. But still there must be one man in the world—and God will make up the difference!"

She threw open a door which gave on a passage leading to a side entrance. A grenadier of the palace guard jumped to attention and presented arms.

"Pardon," he said.

He completely locked the hall; the prince had left nothing to chance. She started to turn back and then hesitated and regarded the man carefully.

"Fritz!" she said at last, for she recognized the peasant who had been a stable-boy on her father's estate before he took service in the grenadiers. "You are Fritz Barr!"

He flushed with pleasure.

"Madame remembers me?"

"And my little black pony you used to take care of?"

"Yes, yes!"

He grinned and nodded; and then she noted a revolver in the holster at his side.

"What are your orders, Fritz?"

"To let no one pass down this hall. I am sorry, *madame*."

"But if I were to ask you for your revolver?"

He stirred uneasily and she took money from her purse and gave it to him.

"With this you could procure another weapon?"

He drew a long breath; the temptation was great.

"I could, *madame*."

"Then do so. It will never be known from whom I received the gun—and my need is desperate—desperate!"

He unbuckled the weapon without a word, and with it in her hand she returned to the room.

There was a tall western window, and before this she drew up a chair to watch the setting of the sun.

"Will he ring the bell when the edge of the sun touches the hills or when it is completely set?" she thought.

The white circle grew yellow; then it took on a taint of orange, bulging oddly at the sides into a clumsy oval. From the gardens below came a stir of voices and then the thrill of a girl's laughter. She smiled as she listened, and, leaning from the window, the west wind blew to her the scent of flowers. She sat there for a long time, breathing deeply of the fragrance and noting all the curves of the lawn with a still, sad pleasure. The green changed from bright to dark; when she looked up the sun had set.

As she turned from the gay western sky, the room was doubly dim and the breeze of the evening set the curtains rustling and whispering. Silence she was prepared for, but not those ghostly voices, not the shift and sweep of the shadows. She turned the electric switch, closing her eyes to blur the shock of the sudden deluge of light. The switch clicked, but when she opened her eyes the room was still dark; they had cut the connecting wires.

Thereafter her mind went mercifully blank, for what she faced was, like birth and death, beyond comprehension. Noise at the windows roused her from the daze at last and she found that a number of workmen were sealing the room so that neither light nor sound could enter or escape. The only air would be from the ventilator. And still she could not realize what had happened, what was to happen, until the last sounds of the workmen ceased and the deep, dread silence began; silence that had a pulse in it—the beating of her heart.

She was standing in the middle of the room when the first shapes formed in the black night, and terror hovered about her suddenly, touching her as with cold fingers. She felt her way back to a corner and crouched there against the wall, waiting, waiting. They had seized the doomed man long before this. They must have bound and gagged him and carried him to the palace.

A thousand types of men passed before her inward eye—thin-faced clerks, men as pale as the belly of a dead fish; bearded monsters, gross and thick-lipped, with

thunderous laughter; laborers, stamped with patient weariness—and all whom she saw carried the sign of the beast in their eyes. She tried to pray, but the voice of the prince rang in her ears: "*Le Dieu, c'est moi!*" and when she named God in her prayers, she visualized Alexander's face, the pale, small eyes, the colorless hair, the lofty brow, the mouth whose tight lips could not be disguised by even the careful mustache. When a key turned in a door, she sprang to her feet with a cry of horror.

"It is I," said the prince.

"I am dying; I cannot stay here; I will marry whom and when you will."

"Ah, my dear, you should have spoken before sunset. I warned you, and I never change my mind. It is only for three days, remember. Also, it is in the interest of science. Beyond that, I have quite taken a fancy to playing God for you for three days. Do you understand?"

The even, mocking tones guided her to him. She fell at his feet and strained his thin knees against her breast.

"Come! Be reasonable, Bertha. This is justice."

"Sire, I want no justice. For God's sake, be merciful."

She heard the shaken breath of his soundless laughter.

"Is it so? You should be grateful to me. Trust me, child, I am bringing you the love of which you have dreamed. Ha! Ha! Ha! *Le Dieu, c'est moi!*"

The clanking of the chain which he carried stilled her voice. It hushed even the thunder of her heart. She rose and waited patiently while the manacle was affixed to her wrist. The prince crossed the room and tapped on the door, which opened, and by a faint light from without Bertha discovered two men carrying a third into the room. She strained her eyes, but could make out no faces. The burden was laid on the floor; a metallic sound told her that she was fettered to the unknown.

The prince said: "You are a brave girl. All may yet be well. Then human nature is finer than I think. We shall see. As for your lover, your gift from God, he is sleeping soundly now. It may be an hour before the effects of the drug wear away. During that time you can think of love. Food will be placed three times a day within the door yonder. You can readily find it by feeling your way around the wall. Farewell."

When the door closed she started to retreat to her corner, but the chain instantly drew taut with a rattle. Strangely enough, much of her fear left her now that she was face to face with the danger; temptation, the prince had called it. She smiled as she remembered. When the man awoke and learned their situation, she had no doubt as to how he would act. She had seen the sign of the beast in the eyes of many men, great and small; she had seen it and understood. The revolver might save her for a time, but what if she slept? She knew it would be almost impossible to remain awake during three days and nights.

The moment her eyes closed the end would come. It seemed better that she should fire the bullet now.

When he recovered his senses, it would be difficult to shoot effectively in the dark, for this was not the gloom of night—it was an absolute void, black, thick, impenetrable. She could not make out her hand at the slightest distance from her eyes. He might even attack her from behind and knock the revolver from her hand before she could shoot. Sooner or later the man must die. Even if she did not kill him it would be accomplished by the command of the prince at the end of the three days. Far better that it should be done at once—that he should never awaken from this sleep. She reached the decision calmly and crept forward to him. Very lightly she passed her hand over his clothes. She had to move his arm to uncover the breast over his heart; the arm was a limp weight, but the muscles were firm, round, and solid. The first qualm troubled her as she realized that this must be a young man, at least a man in the prime of his physical strength.

Then it occurred to her that often bullets fired into the breast are deflected from the heart by the bones; it would be far more certain to lay the muzzle against the temple—press the trigger—the soul would depart.

The soul! She paused with a thrill of wonder. A little touch would loose the swift spirit. The soul! For the first time she saw the tragedy from the view-point of the unknown man. His life was cut in the middle; truly a blind fate had reached out and chosen him from a whole city. Yet she was merely hastening the inevitable. She reached out and found his forehead.

It was broad and high. Tracing it lightly with the tips of her fingers she discovered two rather prominent lumps of bony structure over the eyes. Some one had told her that this represented a strong power of memory. She tried to visualize that feature alone, and very suddenly, as a face shows when a man lights his cigarette on the street at night, she saw in memory the figure of Rembrandt's "Portrait of a Young Painter." He sits at his drawing-board, his pencil poised, ready for the stroke which shall give vital character to his sketch. There is only one high light, falling on the lower part of the face. Inspiration has tightened the sensitive mouth; the questing eyes peer out from the shadow of the soft cap. She broke off from her vision to realize with a start that when she touched the trigger she would be stepping back through the centuries and killing her dream of the original of Rembrandt's picture. A foolish fancy, truly, but in the dark a dream may be as true, as vivid as reality.

The unconscious man sighed. She leaned close and listened to his breathing, soft, hurried, irregular as if he struggled in his sleep, as if the subconscious mind were calling to the conscious: "Awake! Death is here!"

At least there was plenty of time. She need not fire the shot until he moved. She laid the revolver on her lap and absently allowed her hands to wander over his face, lingering lightly on each feature. She grew more alert after a moment. Every particle of her energy was concentrated on seeing that face—on seeing it through her sense of touch. The blind, she knew, grow so dextrous that the delicate nerves of their finger-tips record faces almost as accurately as the eyes of the normal person.

Ah, for one moment of that power! She tried her best. The nose, she told herself, was straight and well modeled. The eyes, for she traced the bony structure around them, must be large; the cheek-bones high, a sign of strength; the chin certainly square and prominent; the lips full and the mouth rather large; the hair waving and thick; the throat large. One by one she traced each detail and then, moving both hands rather swiftly over the face, she strove to build the mental picture of the whole—and she achieved one, but still it was always the young painter whom great Rembrandt had drawn. The illusion would not go out of her mind.

An artist's hands, it is said, must be strong and sinewy. She took these hands and felt the heavy bones of the wrist and strove to estimate the length of the fingers. It seemed to her that this was an ideal hand for a painter—it must be both strong and supple.

He sighed again and stirred; she caught up the weapon with feverish haste and poised it.

"Ah, it is well," said the sleeper in his dream.

She made sure that he was indeed unconscious and then leaned low, whispering: "Adieu, my dear."

At some happy vision he laughed softly. His breath touched her face. Surely he could never know; he had so short a moment left for living; perhaps this would pass into his latest dream on earth and make it happy.

"Adieu!" she whispered again, and her lips pressed on his.

She laid the muzzle of the revolver against his temple, and, summoning all her will-power, she pressed the trigger. It seemed as if she were pulling against it with her full strength, and yet there was no report. Then she realized that all her might

was going into an inward struggle. She summoned to her aid the voice of the prince as he had said: "We put a mask on nature and call it love; we name an abstraction and call it God. *Le Dieu, c'est moi!*" She placed the revolver against the temple of the sleeper; he stirred and disturbed the surety of her direction. She adjusted the weapon again.

Up sprang the man, shouting: "Treason! Help!"

Then he stood silent a long moment; perhaps he was rehearsing the scene of his seizure.

"This is death," he muttered at last, "and I am in hell. I have always known what it would be—dark—utter and bitter loss of light."

As his hand moved, the chain rattled. He sprang back with such violence that his lunging weight jerked her to her feet.

"It is useless to struggle," she cried.

"A woman! Where am I?"

"You are lost."

"But what has happened? In God's name, *madame*, are we chained together?"

"We are."

"By whose power? By whose right and command?"

"By one against whom we cannot appeal."

"My crime?"

"None."

"For how long—"

"Three days."

He heaved a great sigh of relief.

"It is merely some practical joke, I see. That infernal Franz, I knew he was meditating mischief! Three days—and then free?"

"Yes, for then you die."

Once more he was silent.

Then: "This is a hideous dream. I will waken from it at once—at once. My dear lady—"

She heard him advancing.

"Keep the chain taut, sir. I am armed; I will fire at the slightest provocation."

He stopped and laughed.

"Come, come! This is not so bad. You have been smiling in your sleep at me. Up with the lights, my dear. If Franz has engaged you for this business, let me tell you that I'm a far better fellow than he must have advertised me. But what a devil he is to rig up such an elaborate hoax! By Jove, this chain—this darkness—It's enough to turn a fellow's hair white! The black night gets on my nerves. Lights! Lights! I yearn to see you; I prophesy your beauty by your voice! Still coy? Then we'll try persuasion!"

His breast struck the muzzle of the revolver.

She said quietly: "If I move my finger a fraction of an inch you die, sir. And every word I have spoken to you is the truth."

"Well, well! You do this finely. I shall compliment Franz on rehearsing you so thoroughly. Is this the fair Daphne of whom he told me—"

And his hand touched her shoulder.

"By everything that is sacred, I will fire unless you stand back—back to the end of the chain."

"Is it possible? The Middle Ages have returned!"

He moved back until the light chain was taut.

"My mind whirls. I try to laugh, but your voice convinces me. *Madame*, will you explain my situation in words of one syllable?"

"I have explained it already. You are imprisoned in a place from which you

cannot escape. You will be confined here, held to me by this chain, for three days. At the end of that time you die."

"Will you swear this is the truth?"

"Name any oath and I will repeat it."

"There's no need," he said. "No, it cannot be a jest. Franz would never risk the use of a drug, wild as he is. Some other power has taken me. What reason lies behind my arrest?"

"Think of it as a blind and brutal hand which required a victim and reached out over the city to find one. The hand fell upon you. There is no more to say. You can only resign yourself to die an unknown death."

He said at last: "Not unknown, thank God. I leave something which will live after me."

Her heart leaped, for she was seeing once more the artist from Rembrandt's brush.

"Yes, your paintings will not be forgotten."

"I feel that they will not, and the name of—"

"Do not speak it!"

"Why?"

"I must not hear your name."

"But you know it already. You spoke of my painting."

"I have never seen your face; I have never heard your name: you were brought to me in this room darkened as you find it now."

"Yet you knew—"

Her voice was marvelously low: "I touched your face, sir, and in some way I knew."

After a time he said: "I believe you. This miracle is no greater than the others. But why do you not wish to know my name?"

"I may live after you, and when I see your pictures I do not wish to say: 'This is his work; this is his power; this is his limitation.' Can you understand?"

"I will try to."

"I sat beside you while you were unconscious, and I pictured your face and your mind for myself. I will not have that picture reduced to a reality."

"It is a delicate fancy. You are blind? You see by the touch of your hands?"

"I am not blind, but I think I have seen your face through the touch."

"Here! I have stumbled against two chairs. Let us sit down and talk. I will slide this chair further away if you wish. Do you fear me?"

"No, I think I am not afraid. I am only very sad for you. Listen: I have laid down the revolver. Is that rash?"

"*Madame*, my life has been clean. Would I stain it now? No, no! Sit here—so! My hand touches yours—you are not afraid?—and a thrill leaps through me. Is it the dark that changes all things and gives eyes to your imagination, or are you really very beautiful?"

"How shall I say?"

"Be very frank, for I am a dying man, am I not? And I should hear the truth."

"You are a profound lover of the beautiful?"

"I am a painter, *madame*."

She called up the image of her face—the dingy brown hair, long and silken, to be sure; the colorless, small eyes; the common features which the first red-skinned farmer's daughter could overmatch.

"Describe me as you imagine me. I will tell you when you are wrong."

"May I touch you, *madame*, as you touched me? Or would that trouble you?"

She hesitated, but it seemed to her that the questing eyes of Rembrandt's portrait looked upon her through the dark—eyes reverent and eager at once.

She said: "You ~~may~~ do as you will."

His unmanacled hand went up, found her hair, passed slowly over its folds.

"It is like silk to the touch, but far more delicate, for there is life in every thread of it. It is abundant and long. Ah, it must shine when the sun strikes upon it! It is golden hair, *madame*, no pale-yellow like sea-sand, but glorious gold, and when it hangs across the whiteness of your throat and bosom the hearts of men stir. Speak! Tell me I have named it!"

She waited till the sob grew smaller in her throat.

"Yes, it is golden hair," she said.

"I could not be wrong."

His hand passed down her face, fluttering lightly, and she sensed the eagerness of every touch. Cold fear took hold of her lest those searching fingers should discover the truth.

"Your eyes are blue. Yes, yes! Deep-blue for golden hair. It cannot be otherwise. Speak."

"God help me!"

"*Madame?*"

"I have been too vain of my eyes, sir. Yes, they are blue."

The fingers were on her cheeks, trembling on her lips, touching chin and throat.

"You are divine. It was foredoomed that this should be! Yes, my life has been one long succession of miracles, but the greatest was reserved until the end. I have followed my heart through the world in search of perfect beauty and now I am about to die, I find it. Oh, God! For one moment with canvas, brush, and the blessed light of the sun! It cannot be! No miracle is complete; but I carry out into the eternal night one perfect picture. Canvas and paint? No, no! Your picture must be drawn in the soul and colored with love. The last miracle and the greatest! Three days? No, three ages, three centuries of happiness, for are you not here?"

Who will say that there is not an eye with which we pierce the night? To each of these two sitting in the utter dark there came a vision. Imagination became more real than reality. He saw his ideal of the woman, that picture which every man carries in his heart to think of in the times of silence, to see in every void. And she saw her ideal of manly power. The dark pressed them together as if with the force of physical hands. For a moment they waited, and in that moment each knew the heart of the other, for in that utter void of light and sound, they saw with the eyes of the soul and they heard the music of the spheres.

Then she seemed to hear the voice of the prince: "You should be grateful to me. Trust me, child, I am bringing you that love of which you dreamed. *Le Dieu, c'est moi!*"

Yes, it was the voice of doom which had spoken from those sardonic lips. The dark which annihilates time made their love a century old.

"In all the world," she whispered, "there is one man for every woman. It is the hand of Heaven which gives me to you."

"Come closer—so! And here I have your head beside mine as God foredoomed. Listen! I have power to look through the dark and to see your eyes—how blue they are!—and to read your soul beneath them. We have scarcely spoken a hundred words and yet I see it all. Through a thousand centuries our souls have been borne a thousand times and in every life we have met, and known—"

And through the utter dark, the merciful dark, the deep, strong music of his voice went on, and she listened, and forgot the truth and closed her eyes against herself.

On the night which closed the third day the prince approached the door of the

sealed room. To the officer of the secret police, who stood on guard, he said: "Nothing has been heard."

"Early this afternoon there were two shots, I think."

"Nonsense. There are carpenters doing repair work on the floor above. You mistook the noise of their hammers."

He waved the man away, and as he fitted the key into the lock he was laughing softly to himself: "Now for the revelation, the downward head, the shame. Hal! Hal! Hal!"

He opened the door and flashed on his electric lantern. They lay upon a couch wrapped in each other's arms. He had shot her through the heart and then turned the weapon on himself; his last effort must have been to draw her closer. About them was wrapped the chain, idle and loose. Surely death had no sting for them and the grave no victory, for the cold features were so illumined that the prince could hardly believe them dead.

He turned the electric torch on the painter. He was a man about fifty, with long, iron-gray hair, and a stubble of three days' growth covering his face. It was a singularly ugly countenance, strong, but savagely lined, and the forehead corrugated with the wrinkles of long, mental labor. But death had made Bertha beautiful. Her eyes under the shadow of her lashes, seemed a deep-sea blue, and her loose, brown hair, falling across the white throat and breast, seemed almost golden under the light of the torch. A draft from the open door moved the hair and the heart of the prince stirred in him.

He strove to loosen the arms of the painter, but they were frozen stiff by death.

"She was a fool, and the loss is small," sighed the prince. "After all, perhaps God was nearer than I thought. I bound them together with a chain. He saw my act and must have approved, for see! He has locked them together forever. Well, after all—*le Dieu, c'est moi!*"

THIRD TALE

PLUMB NAUSEATED

BY E. K. MEANS

"YES, suh, I feels plum' qualified to take on a wife."

The black negro blushed to a darker hue and his face shone like polished ebony in the blazing August sun. In his embarrassment he twisted his shapeless wool hat into a wad, thrust it under his arm like a bundle, turned his back upon the white man's quizzical eyes, and sat down upon the lowest step of the porch.

At the feet of the white man lay half a dozen pairs of handcuffs. He stooped and picked up a pair which showed rusty in the bright light, rubbed the rust off with sand-paper, squirted some oil into the mechanism from a little can, and busied himself for a few minutes seeing that his police hardware was in good condition.

The sheriff remained silent for so long that the negro imagined he had been forgotten. Then Flournoy fired a question so unexpectedly that the black man winced: "What's your name?"

"Dey calls me Plaster Sickety."

"Gosh!" the sheriff exploded. "Can any woman be induced to exchange a perfectly decent name for a smear like that?"

"Suttinly," the negro grinned. "Dat gal's name ain't so awful cute. Dey calls her Pearline Flunder."

"Plaster Sickety and Pearline Flunder—help, everybody! What sort of children will issue from a matrimonial alliance of such names?"

"I reckon our chillun will all be borned Huns, Marse John; but I cain't he'p it."

Under his manipulation the sheriff's worn handcuffs took on a polish like new. At intervals he glanced up from his task to see the sunlight spraying from the pecan-trees like water and the heat rising from the ground, visible as a boiling cloud. Once he heard an eagle scream, and glanced toward the Little Mocassin swamp to behold a black speck sail into the haze that hung like a curtain of purple and gold upon the horizon. The negro sat motionless except for glowing black eyes restless as mercury and all-perceiving.

Suddenly the bear-trap mouth of the big sheriff twisted into a little smile.

"How'd you like to give your girl one of these things for a wedding-present, Plaster?" he asked, as he tossed a polished pair of handcuffs on the step beside the negro.

"I's kinder pestered in my mind 'bout gittin' a fitten weddin'-present, Marse John, but—" Plaster rose to his feet and returned the manacles without completing his sentence.

"How much money have you got?" Flournoy asked.

"I ain't got none till yit."

"How you going to buy the license? How you going to pay the preacher?" Flournoy asked.

"Dat's whut I come to git a view from you about, Marse John. All de cullud folks gives you a rep dat you is powerful good to niggers an' I figgered dat you an' me mought fix up some kind of shake-down so I could git married 'thout costin' me nothin'."

"Don't you ever read the Bible?" Flournoy growled. "Even Adam's wife cost him one bone."

"Yes, suh," the negro grinned. "But I figger ef Sheriff Flournoy had been aroun' anywheres at dat time, mebbe Adam would 'a' got off a whole lot cheaper."

"Have you got a job to support your wife?" Flournoy asked.

"Naw, suh."

"Have you got a house to live in?"

"Naw, suh."

"Where are you going to live with her—in a hollow sycamore-tree?"

"Yes, suh, I reckon so—dat is, excusin' ef you don't he'p us none."

"Where are you two idiots going to derive your sustenance—from the circum-ambient atmosphere?"

"Dat's de word, Marse John—dat is, excusin' ef you don't loant us a hand in our troubles," the negro murmured, wondering what the sheriff's big talk meant.

"Do you love this black girl very much?" the sheriff asked with that odd turn of tone with which every man speaks of love when he is in love with love.

"Boss," the black man answered in a voice which throbbed, "I been lovin' dat gal ever since she warn't no bigger dan—dan—dan a June-bug whut had visited accidental a woodpecker prayer-meetin'."

"Is she good to look at, Plaster?" Flournoy smiled.

"Well, suh, I cain't lie to no white man, Marse John; an' I tells you honest—she looks a whole heap better at night in de dark of de moon."

"If she ain't a good-looker, why do you love her?" Flournoy asked without a smile.

"She's good sense an' 'judgment, Marse John," the black man answered earnestly. "An'—an'—I jes' nachelly loves her."

Flournoy studied a moment, twisting a pair of steel handcuffs in his giant hands. Finally he spoke:

"Plaster, I have a cabin down on the Coolie Bayou which I have given to three young married couples in succession on the condition that they live there in peace and amity for one year."

"Yes, suh."

"Every couple broke up and got a divorce within nine months."

"Too bad, Marse John, dat's mighty po' luck."

"You niggers think you love each other until you get hitched and then you don't stay hitched."

"Some shorely don't—dey don't fer a fack."

"Now I make you and Pearline Flunder this offer: I will buy your marriage-license, pay Vinegar Atts to marry you, bear all the expense of a church wedding, give you a job so you can support your wife, and I will make you a present of that cabin down on the Coolie Bayou if you and your wife will live together for three days without busting up in a row."

"Three days, Marse John!" the negro howled. "Boss, I motions to make it thurty years!"

"No!" Flournoy snapped. "Three days!"

"I's willin', Marse John," the negro laughed, cutting a caper on the grass.

"All right!" the sheriff said as he stooped and picked up a pair of handcuffs. "Now listen: I intend to cut the little chain on these two manacles and attach each cuff to a ten-foot chain. When you and Pearline are married, I am going to put one of these manacles around her wrist and one around your wrist"—the negro showed the whites of his eyes—"and bind you two honey-loves together with a ten-foot chain." The negro looked behind him toward the gate and the public highway, took a tighter grip upon his hat, and made a furtive step backward. "You are to remain bound together for three days." The negro smiled and stepped forward. "At the end of that time you are to come here and report, and if you agree to spend the remainder of your life together, the cabin is yours!"

"Make it a two-feets chain, Marse John, so us kin git clost to each yuther," Plaster pleaded.

"What I have spoken I have spoken," Flournoy proclaimed autocratically. "Now, go tell your sweetheart all about it."

II.

THE Big Four of Tickfall sat around a much bewhittled pine table in the Hen-Scratch saloon. The room was hazy with their tobacco-smoke. Conversation languished. The session was about to adjourn until to-morrow at the same hour. Figger Bush laid his cigarette upon the edge of the table, lifted his head like a dog baying the moon, and chanted:

"O you muss be a lover of de landlady's daughter
Or you can't git a secont piece of pie!"

Before the other could catch the tune, the green-baize doors of the saloon were thrown open and a white man entered. Every negro looked up into that granite face with its deep-set eyes, iron jaw, and rugged lines of strength and purpose, and smiled a joyful welcome:

"Mawnin', Marse John. 'Tain't no use to come sheriffin' down dis way. No niggers ain't done nothin'."

"I am hunting for a Methodist clergyman of color," Flournoy grinned.

"Boss," Vinegar Atts chuckled as he rose to his feet, "I's de blackest an' best

nigger preacher whut is, an' I b'lieves in de Mefdis doctrine of fallin' from grace an' grease. Ef you misdoubts my words, ax my wife. Dat ole woman admits dat fack herse'f."

"I want you to perform a wedding ceremony at the Shoofly Church to-night at seven o'clock," the sheriff announced.

Instantly the Rev. Vinegar Atts thrust both hands into the pockets of his trousers and brought his hands out, turning out the pockets and showing them empty.

"Dar now, Figger Bush!" Vinegar bellowed. "I tole you dat de good Lawd would pervide a way fer me to pay fer dem near-booze grape-juices I been guzzlin' in yo' sinful saloom! Five dollars will settle wid you an' leave a few change over fer seegaws."

"Who's cormittin' mattermony, Marse John?" Mustard Prophet wanted to know. "Is it one of dese here shotgun weddin's?"

"Plaster Sickety wishes to wed Pearline Flunder."

"I knows 'em," Hitch Diamond rumbled from his big chest. "De good Lawd will shore got to pervide fer dem coons like He do fer Vinegar Atts—nary one is got git-up enough to make a livin'."

"Those young colored honey-birds are under my special care and protection," Flournoy announced, smiling. "I intend to house them and take care of them and get them work. They are an experiment."

"De trouble wid experiments is dis, Marse John," Mustard chuckled, "sometimes dey bust in yo' face."

"My plan is this," Flournoy told them. "I am going to tie those two negroes together with a ten-foot chain and they are to live in peace and amity for three days."

"Lawdymussy, Marse John!" the Rev. Vinegar Atts bellowed. "Did you ever tie two cats to each yuther an' hang 'em over de limb of a tree?"

"Yes."

"Does you recommember how quick dem cats got tired of each yuther's sawsiety an' fell out wid theirselves?"

"Certainly."

Vinegar jerked a yellow bandana handkerchief from the tail of his coat and mopped the top of his bald head.

"You mought care fer dem niggers ef you ties 'em togedder, Marse John. But you ain't gwine be able to pertection 'em—not from each yuther," Vinegar announced as he slapped at his face with his kerchief. "I wouldn't be tied to my nigger wife wid a telephome-wire long enough to conversation de man in de moon. Naw, suh! Dat ole gal would be yankin' on dat line like a catfish all de time. Whoosh!"

"I agrees wid dem religium sentiments," Hitch Diamond rumbled. "Now you example Goldie, my own wife. Dat little yeller gal's maw is a lunatic, an' Goldie ain't no lunatic, but she ain't got her right mind. I wouldn't mind bein' a Dandyllion in de lion's den, like de Bible tells about—dat would gib me a chance to fight fer my gizzard. But chained up to Goldie—"

Hitch broke off, shook his head in earnest negation, rubbed one giant hand around his iron-thewed wrist as if he could feel the holy bonds of matrimony and gave utterance to one expressive word: "Gawd!"

"Hol' on, niggers!" Figger Bush exclaimed. "I don't foller you-alls in dem sentiments. Now I been married to Scootie gwine on two year an' I ain't never got too much of dat gal yit. I cherishes de opinion dat Marse John could tie our heads togedder an' I wouldn't complain none."

"I sides wid Figger Bush," Mustard Prophet grinned. "I been livin' off an' on wid Hopey fer twenty year, an' dat gal is busted stove-wood over my head off an' on plenty of times, but I don't bear her no grouch. She kin always make peace by givin' me some hot biskits an' a few sirup."

"You four niggers talk too much." Flournoy grinned. "I want you to get busy and decorate that Shoofly Church and pull the biggest Tickfall church wedding ever seen in the social sets of our colored circles. I'll pay for everything."

"Us fo' niggers will git our wives an' pull some kind of nice stunt ourselves, too, Marse John," Vinegar howled. "We'll fix up a good send-off fer 'em."

At seven o'clock that evening the Flournoy automobile conveyed the happy pair to the Shoofly Church. The Rev. Vinegar Atts proceeded with the ceremony until the bride sported a new ring and the two were pronounced man and wife with the solemn admonition:

"Whom God hath joined together, let not man put asunder!"

Thereupon Sheriff Flournoy stepped forward and with the ease of long practise slipped a manacle upon the right wrist of the bride and another upon the left wrist of the groom and snapped the handcuffs shut.

Figger Bush stooped and lifted a long bottle from a bucket of ice. There was a loud pop, the cork struck against the ceiling, ricocheted around the walls of the room and caused a commotion by falling on Vinegar's bald head. Figger advanced with a tray containing three glasses and the sheriff toasted the bride and groom.

The ten-foot chain rattled as the bride raised her manacled hand to drink.

When they marched out of the church the entire congregation formed a procession and accompanied them to their cabin on the Coolie Bayou. They noticed that Plaster Sickety picked up the chain and wrapped a turn around his bride's neck and one about his own, thus shortening the bond and bringing them close together. They clamped their arms around each other's waists, and plodded solemnly through the deep dust of the crooked highway.

"Dat nigger cain't park his wife like a new automobile an' walk off an' leave her," Vinegar chuckled.

"He ain't actin' anxious to git away—now," Hitch rumbled pessimistically.

"Not yit, but soon," Vinegar agreed.

Approaching the cabin, Plaster Sickety's voice broke into exultant song, and through the negro's wonderful gift of improvisation, he produced this neat bit:

"Dar's a Pearline pearl of price untold,
An' dat Pearline pearl cain't be bought wid gold;
An' dat Pearline pearl am good to see,
Fer dat Pearline pearl b'longs to me!"

"Listen to dat fool!" Hitch Diamond chuckled. "He's singin' like a little black angel whut had swiped de pearliest pearl offen de pearly gates!"

The bride and groom entered their cabin and softly closed the door.

Good night!

III.

"Looky here, Pearline, I ain't used to totin' dis ole steel band on my wrist an' it hurts my feelin's," Plaster complained as they sat at the breakfast-table before a meal which had been left on the door-step a few minutes before by Hitch Diamond.

"Don't begin to howl an' pull back like a dawg tied under a wagon, Plaster," Pearline urged prettily, as she helped herself to liberal portions of the breakfast prepared in Sheriff Flournoy's kitchen. "You won't kick about wearin' it as long as you loves me, will you?"

"No'm," Plaster said, as he lifted the chain to a more comfortable place upon the dining-table. "But I shore wish dat white man hadn't choosed such a heavy chain."

"Dis chain ain't heavy, Plaster," Pearline protested. "You hadn't oughter talk dat way. Excusin' dat, I likes dis chain—it ties us to each yuther. Don't you like it?"

"Yes'm, I shore does."

"How come you complains about it fer?"

"I ain't got no lament, Pearline—dat is, I ain't mean it dat way."

The bridegroom filled his mouth with food and for the next ten minutes ate voraciously. One watching him would draw the inference that he was not eating to enjoy the food so much as to find some occupation for his mouth beside speech.

Pearline reached out with her free hand and toyed with the chain, twisting it about her fingers lovingly, a dreamy light in her coal-black eyes.

"U's had de biggest weddin' in cullud circles, Plaster," she murmured.

"I ain't no cullud circle," Plaster mumbled, his mouth full of food. "But I reckon I got to run circles aroun' you 'slong as dis ole chain stays on. Don't rattle dat chain so loud, Pearly! Gosh! It makes a heap of racket fer its little size."

"You jes' now said it wus a big, heavy chain fer its size," his wife reminded him in a sweetly argumentative tone.

"Yes'm, it am—dis chain is bofe little an' big—fer its size," the groom amended hastily. "Stop talkin' about dis chain!"

"You started dis talk," Pearline reminded him reproachfully. "You said it hurted yo' wrist."

There was a loud knock upon the door. Plaster sprang up to answer. The chain jerked at his wrist.

"Good gawsh!" he snorted. "Come to de door wid me, honey, so I kin open up."

"I cain't, Plaster," the bride exclaimed in a panic. "I ain't dressed fer comp'ny dis soon in de mawnin'."

"You's got on all de clothes you owns," the groom reminded her.

"Suttinly, but I ain't got no white powder on my black nose," she giggled.

"Come back in de nex' room an' let me fresh up befo' we opens de door."

"I stayed in dar a plum' hour while you wus freshin' up fer yo' vittles," Plaster grumbled.

"Don't git grumped up, Plaster," Pearline urged. "You ack like yo' love is commenced to wilt aroun' de edges."

Meekly the man followed her to the bedroom and stood for fifteen minutes while the bride primped her hair, powdered her nose, adjusted her collar, fiddled with her belt, put pins in her shirt-waist, took them out and deposited them in her mouth, put them back into her waist, turned around and looked at herself in the mirror, hunted for a fresh handkerchief and could not find it, located it at last in the bosom of her waist, wondered where she had left her chewing-gum, found it on top of the box of face-powder, and finally said:

"Come on—less hurry up. Dat comp'ny will git tired waitin' fer us!"

"Dat comp'ny is done done it," Plaster sighed. "I peeped through de crack in de door an' seed 'em. Hitch Diamond knocked fo' times, den opened de door an' picked up dem breakfast-dishes an' trod out."

"Dat's too bad," Pearline remarked with no interest whatever. She was looking at herself in the mirror. "I'd like to seen Hitchie. He use to be one of my ole sweethearts."

"Come out an' set under de tree wid me an' mebbe dat ole sweetheart of yourn will come back," Plaster suggested.

"I don't like to git out in de sunshine," the girl replied. "Dar's too much glare."

"Too much—which?" Plaster asked.

"Glare."

"Yes'm."

Plaster stood looking at her helplessly, wondering where they were going from there.

"Does you love me, Plaster?" the girl asked, siding up to him and stepping on the chain.

"Yes'm," Plaster answered as he pulled the chain from under her feet and rubbed his wrist. "Don't step on dat chain no mo'. You might break it."

"How come you don't tell me you loves me?"

"I done tole you 'bout fawty times dis mawnin'," Plaster reminded her.

"But you ain't never tole me onless I axed you."

"Less go somewhar an' set down an' I'll tell you a millyum times," Plaster said eagerly.

"Bless Gawd, I knows you loves me a plum' plenty, but I likes to hear you tell dem words. Wait a minute till I puts—er—I b'lieve I oughter change de collar on dis dress. A clean one would make me look mo' fresher."

Plaster lingered until the woman was dressed to her fancy, resting his weight first on one impatient leg, then upon the other.

"You wastes a heap of time fixin' yo'se'f, Pearly," he sighed at last. "I hopes you'll soon git dressed up fer de day."

"You wants yo' wife to look nice, don't you?" she asked reproachfully.

"Yes'm."

"How kin I look nice 'thout takin' de time to dress?"

They went out and sat down under the pecan-tree in the "glare." Pearline seemed to have forgotten the glare. Plaster lighted a cigarette, smoked it to the end, lighted another, smoked it to the end, and lighted another. Then Pearline remarked:

"Honey, does you love me more dan you loves dem cigareets?"

"I shore does," Plaster replied with moderate fervor.

"Does you love me a millyum times mo' dan you loves cigareets?"

"Suttinly."

"Den, fer gossake, throw dem cigareets away! Dey smells like some kind of fumigate."

"I cain't do that, Pearly. Dese here smokes costes money. An' I couldn't affode to buy 'em ef I had to wuck fer de money. Dey's a weddin' present."

"Is you gwine smoke all yo' married life?"

"Yes'm."

"But you ain't gwine smoke no more fer de nex' three days, is you?"

"No'm."

Pearline thrust her hand into Plaster's pocket and brought forth his precious smokes. She concealed them in the mysterious recesses of her attire and Plaster sighed deeply.

Ten minutes later the girl straightened up with a fierceness that nearly snapped her spinal column.

"Fer mussy sake, Plaster Sickety! Whut is you got in yo' mouf?"

"I's nibblin' a few crumbs of terbacker, honey," Plaster said apologetically.

"My gawsh! You aim to tell me dat you chaws?"

"Yes'm. I chaws a little bit now an' den. It kinder helps my brains to think an' sattles my stomick."

There was a long silence. Plaster stared straight ahead of him, his jaws moving with the regularity of a ruminant cow, his eyes counting the leaves on the trees, the pickets on the broken-down fence, and estimating the number of ants crawling out of a hill. Then, unconsciously, he reached into his pocket for another cigarette. He did not find it.

He heard a suspicious sound beside him and looked at Pearline.

"Whut you cryin' about, honey?"

"You tole me you loved me more dan cigareets, an' yit you cain't set by me a minute 'thout chawin' terbacker," she wailed. "You is blood kin brudder to a worm an' a goat—nothin' else chaws!"

"Lawd!" Plaster sighed in desperation. "I sees now dat I'm got to learn how to suck eggs an' hide de shells."

Suddenly a loud whoop was heard near at hand and out of the swamp came Vinegar Atts, Figger Bush, Mustard Prophet and Hitch Diamond.

"Hey, niggers!" Plaster bawled. "Come up an' set down. Lawd, I never was so glad to see nobody in my whole life."

"Good mawnin', Sister Pearline!" Vinegar chuckled. "How is yo'-alls enjoyin' mattermony life by now?"

"Fine!" the bride smiled, with a suspicion of tears still in her eyes.

"Praise de Lawd!" exclaimed Vinegar. "I was skeart you niggers would be fightin' by now, an' mebbe one of yous would be draggin' de yuther on de eend of dat chain—dead!"

"Naw, suh!" Plaster howled, as he snatched a cigar out of Hitch Diamond's pocket and stuck it in his mouth. "Us is gittin' along puffedly."

Plaster snatched his cigar from his lips with his manacled hand and flourished it with a motion of broad contentment. Pearline gave the chain a quick jerk and the smoke flew from Plaster's fingers and fell over in the high grass.

"You two idjits look like a holy show to me," Figger Bush cackled. "How come you don't charge admissions to de show an' git rich?"

"Us wouldn't git rich quick," Pearline giggled. Hitch Diamond had retrieved the cigar, and Pearline had taken it from him and stuck it in her hair. "You-alls is de onlies' comp'ny we is had till yit."

"I hopes you niggers will stay wid us all day, brudders," Plaster exclaimed earnestly. "We was feelin' kinder—er—me an' Pearline was feelin' sorter—er—"

"Uh-huh," Hitch Diamond grunted knowingly. "Dat's a fack. We ole married folks onderstan's dem feelin's. I'd feel dat way mese'f ef I was in yo' fix. I'd whet up my teeth on a brick-bat an' bite myse'f in my own gizzard an' die."

"Not me!" Figger Bush howled. "Ef I was chained to dat little gal, I'd git me a plow-line an' wrop it aroun' our necks."

"I would, too," Vinegar bellowed. "But I'd tie de yuther eend of dat plow-line to a tree an' jump off de worl'."

"I bet Pearline don't hanker to jump offen no worl'," Mustard Prophet proclaimed. "Look at her—she's jes' as happy as ef she had sense."

The eyes of the four men turned upon the girl appraisingly. Then Pearline remembered that a few moments before she had been sniffing and shedding tears. She was sure her eyes were red, and she knew the tears had washed all the white powder off her black nose. Quickly she rose to her feet, giving the ten-foot chain a sharp jerk.

"I hates to take you from yo' frien's, Plaster," she exclaimed, "but I'm got to go in. I cain't stand de glare."

Side by side they entered the cabin and the chain rattled as they shut the door. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

IV. •

"Stop scatterin' dem shavin's all over de floor, Plaster," Pearline commanded. "Ef folks comes to see us, I don't want dis house all literated up wid trash."

"I got to whittle while you sews, honey," Plaster said patiently. "I wanted to sot out in de yard, but you kep' me in de house all yistiddy afternoon because you said you had de headache from de glare."

"You kin whittle 'thout messin' up dis room," Pearline snapped.

"I likes a messy room," the man declared. "It looks like folks lived in it an' was tol'able comfer'ble."

"You cain't mess up my house ef I got to come atter you an' clean up," the woman replied in a tone of finality.

A hound-dog stuck his wistful face into the door, seeking an invitation to enter.

"Dar's a frien' in need," the bridegroom proclaimed happily. "Come here, dawg!"

"Git out o' here!" the woman shrieked, kicking at the hound and sending him out with a howl. "I don't want dat houn' in dis house scratchin' his fleas all over de rooms. Look at de mud dat dawg tracked in. Come wadin' through de bayou an' den come trackin' through de house!"

"Dar's some advantages in livin' a dawg's life, Pearline," Plaster sighed. "Even excusin' de fleas, dar's plenty advantage. A dawg, even a married dawg, he ain't tied up all de time an' kin run aroun' some."

"You aims to say you's gittin' tired stayin' here wid me?" Pearline snapped.

"No'm. Nothin' like dat. I's happy as a mosquiter on a pickaninny's nose."

"Ef you feels tied up like a houn'-dawg in de middle of de secont day, how does you expeck to feel in de middle of de secont year?"

Plaster thought it best not to venture a reply. He looked through the open door at the hound, lying under the china-berry tree in the glare, placidly scratching fleas, bumping the elbow of his hind leg on the soft ground as he scratched.

"Don't you never answer no 'terrogations when I axes you?" Pearline asked sharply. "How you gwine feel in de middle of de secont year?"

Out of sheer perversity Plaster was disposed to tell her that he would feel dead and buried for at least a year before the time she mentioned, but instead he swallowed hard three times. His throat was dry and his tongue rasped his mouth like sand-paper. His answer, finally, was a song:

"She'll be sweeter as de days go by;
She'll git sweeter as de moments fly;
She'll git sweeter an' be dearer
As to me she draws mo' nearer—
Sweeter as de days go by."

Thereupon Pearline jumped from her chair, got a strangle-hold upon her husband, sat down on him, and impressed him forcibly in the next half-hour that his wife was a heavyweight and the day was extremely warm.

Plaster made such a hit with his improvised song that he repeated it three times, then gradually eased his wife off his lap and onto a chair.

"Don't you never shave yo' face, Plaster?" the lady asked when the love scene ended. "You feels like a stubby shoe-brush."

"No'm, my whiskers don't pester me none."

"But dey looks so bad," the woman urged.

"I cain't see 'em," Plaster grinned.

"I wants you to shave eve'y day while you is married to me."

"Huh," Plaster grunted.

"An' I wants you to brush up yo' clothes, Plaster," the woman told him. "You looks scandalous dusty."

"I looks as good as you does," Plaster retorted. "I's got powdered dirt on my clothes an' you's got powdered chalk on yo' nose. You looks too dang dressy fer me anyhow. I favors bein' dusty an' easy-feelin'."

The discussion ended by the appearance of three women who came to the open door from the highroad.

"Look at dat, now!" Plaster exclaimed. "Here comes three ole gals of mine. I co'ted 'em all servigerous, but it didn't git me nothin'."

"Whut dey buttin' in here fer?" Pearline asked in sharp tones.

"Mebbe dey'll tell us when dey comes in," Plaster chuckled.

The three women were the wives of Hitch Diamond, Figger Bush, and Vinegar Atts. When they entered they came straight to the point.

"Plaster, us ladies wants to talk to Sister Pearline Flunder Sickety in privut."

"Dat cain't be did, sisters," Plaster answered, looking them over suspiciously. "Whut does you want to tell my wife in privut?"

"Dat's a secret," Scootie Bush giggled.

Plaster looked at the women with an earnest effort to read their intentions. He recalled certain incidents in his association with the three in the old days of happy courtship that he preferred his wife should not know. He thought he saw mischief in the eyes of each of the women, especially Scootie and Goldie, and he shook his head.

"Nothin' ain't told in privut, sisters," he announced. "Leastwise, not till atter de third day."

"Does you aim to say dat I cain't conversation in privut wid my frien's?" Pearline snapped.

"No'm, not perzackly dat," Plaster hastened to explain. "But it looks kinder impossible to me as long as I'm tied up wid you on dis chain."

"Git over agin dat wall while dese ladies whispers to me," Pearline replied, giving him a push.

Plaster sat down and strained his ears to hear. What he heard was spasmodic giggles. He saw mischievous glances directed to himself. Once he saw his wife look straight at him reproachfully, as if she suspected that he was trying to overhear. There was half an hour of this, then the three giggling women took their departure.

"Whut did dem nigger women want, Pearline?" Plaster demanded.

"Dat's a fambly secret," Pearline giggled.

"Does you think you oughter hab any secrets from yo' cote-house husbunt?" Plaster demanded belligerently.

"Naw, suh. Not no secrets dat stays secrets, but dis here little myst'ry will git public powerful soon."

Coming through the medium of Plaster's troubled conscience, this answer sounded ominous. Pearline picked up some sewing and Plaster reached for his unwhittled stick. He spent one half-hour in deep thought. He was sorry he had told Pearline that those three women were old sweethearts of his. He recalled that his courtship of each woman had broken up in a row and a fist-fight. It had been one-sided, the women conducting the row and doing all the fighting while Plaster endeavored to escape. Now Plaster had no other idea than that they were hot on his trail. They were planning to make his life miserable through the jealousy of his wife.

There was a loud knock on the front door. The two arose and opened to Vinegar Atts, Figger Bush, and Hitch Diamond.

"Sister Sickety, us three niggers is a cormittee of three app'inted to wait in privut on Brudder Plaster Sickety an' hol' a secret confab wid him," Vinegar announced pompously.

"I don't allow my husbunt to hab no secrets from me," Pearline answered, looking suspiciously at her old sweetheart, Hitch Diamond.

"Dis am a man's pussonal bizzness, Pearline," Hitch Diamond rumbled. "A nigger woman is got to butt out."

"But I's chained up wid Plaster," Pauline protested.

"Git over agin dat wall while dese gen'lemens whispers to me," Plaster remarked, giving her a push toward the chair which he had occupied under similar circumstances a short time before.

The three committeemen walked up close to Plaster, draped their arms over his shoulders, and talked in whispers, but guffawed out loud. Because Pearline was present their eyes irresistibly sought hers, especially when they laughed—what man

can keep from looking at the woman in a room?—and Pearline inferred that they were talking and laughing about her. She strained her ears to hear, but not a word enlightened her ignorance. Then with a loud laugh the three men patted Plaster on the back and took themselves off.

"Whut did them niggers want, Plaster?" Pearline demanded in irate tones.

"Dat's a fambly secret," Plaster quoted mockingly.

"I felt like a fool wid dem mens lookin' at me an' snickerin'," the woman complained. "Wus dey talkin' about me?"

"Yes'm," the man chuckled.

This remark set Pearline to thinking about certain incidents. Hitch had been an old sweetheart, Figger Bush and Vinegar Atts had paid her courtly attentions, and some things had happened that she would rather not have to explain to her husband. There was a dismal depthless gulf of painful silence between the honeymooners for a long time. Then Pearline said with difficulty:

"I don't like de nigger mens you 'socheates wid. Dem three niggers ain't fitten comp'ny fer my husbunt."

"Dat's whut I thinks about dem three womens dat come to see you," Plaster answered. "Ef you runs wid dat color of petticoats I shore will disrespeck you mo' dan I does now."

"I runs wid anybody I chooses," Pearline snapped.

"Me, too," Plaster retorted.

They pulled apart and the chain rattled.

They stepped back from the entrance and closed the door.

And the evening and the morning were the second day.

V.

By sleeping until the noon-hour the two love-captives shortened the third day by half.

In the two days past they had exhausted every theme of conversation, had wearied of every kind of amusement they could devise, and had pumped their hearts dry of language to proclaim and protest their affection for each other to lubricate the machinery of existence amid the friction of their disposition and temperament.

The day before Plaster had made a hit with a song, so he decided to fill every moment of that day until the sun sank below the horizon with vocal music, for song banishes conversation and song is not provocative of difference of opinion and argument—so he thought. While he and his wife were dressing, Plaster began:

"Does you know dat I am dyin'
 Fer a little bit of love?
 Everywhar dey hears me sighin'
 Fer a little bit of love.
 Fer dat love dat grows mo' strong,
 Fills de heart wid hope and song,
 I has waited—oh, so long—
 Fer a little bit of love."

"Whut makes you sing so dang loud, Plaster?" Pearline asked wearily, as she rested her head upon her hands. "You sounds like a brayin' jackace mournin' because he done tumbled down a open well."

"One time you said you liked my singin'," Plaster retorted.

"I couldn't tell you whut I really thought about it in dem sad days," Pearline remarked.

They ate their noon meal in silence because neither could think of anything to

say. Plaster had got the hook at the very beginning of his musical career, and the things he thought of to say were not fit for utterance or publication.

As they rose from the table, they looked with surprise out of the window.

A long procession of negroes approached the cabin. All were dressed in their best clothes and the Rev. Vinegar Atts was in the lead.

The bridal pair suddenly remembered something, and they stepped out on the porch to receive them as they filled the space in front of the house.

Vinegar took his famous preaching attitude in front of the porch, inflated his lungs and began:

"Brudder an' Sister Sickety, us is all rejoiced dat you two honey-loves is got mighty nigh through wid yo' honey-tower widout no fuss or fight. We welcomes you back to our sawsiety wid glad arms. We hopes dat you will love each yuther mo' or less an' off an' on ferever! We knows dat you has well earnt dis house an' lot dat Marse John Flournoy has gib you an' we cullud folks wants to make you a present of a few change so you kin buy some nice house-furnicher an' start out fresh an' new."

Thereupon Vinegar laid his stove-pipe hat upside down upon the floor of the porch, turned and surveyed the assembly while he mopped his bald head with a yellow bandana handkerchief.

"Walk right up, brudders an' sisters, an' drap yo' few change in dis stove-pipe preachin'-hat!"

They came up one by one, laughingly depositing their money, and pausing to shake hands with the bride and groom.

When the ceremony ended, Vinegar emptied his hat upon the floor of the porch, placed it upon his head with a farewell flourish, and led the negroes out of the yard.

"Dis money is de fambly secret dem three nigger womens whispered to me, honey," Pearline giggled.

"Dat's de myst'ry dem three committee fellers tole me," Plaster chuckled.

The two sat down and counted the money—twenty-five dollars and thirty cents!

"Dat thuty cents is yourn to spend foolish, Pearline," Plaster said generously as he pushed three dimes toward her and clutched with both hands at the rest.

"Hol' on, nigger!" Pearline snapped. "I ain't no bayou minnow to git jes' a little nibble of dat money—half of dat cash spondulix is mine."

"Yes'm, but I is de man of de fambly an' I oughter keep it an' han' it out to you as you needs it."

"I needs my half right now," Pearline snapped, placing both her hands upon the clutching paws of Plaster Sickety.

"Whut you gwine do wid twelve dollars an' fo' bits?" Plaster demanded in irate tones.

"Buy me a hat!" Pearline told him.

"You's a fool!" Plaster informed her. "Female hats ain't furnicher."

"Dis money furnishes me wid a hat," she announced positively.

Then they sat for a few minutes in silence, both keeping their hands spread out over the money.

"Whut you gwine do wid yo' twelve dollars an' fo' bits?" Pearline demanded at last.

"I figgers on buyin' a fiddle," Plaster told her. "Plenty money kin be made playin' fiddles, an' I b'lieves I could learn to fiddle ef I had a good chance."

"I ain't gwine hab no fiddlin' nigger in my house," Pearline snorted. "I's druther be married to a phoneygraft."

"You ain't gwine be married to nothin' very long ef you don't leggo dis money, nigger!" Plaster snarled.

"I is."

"You ain't."

"Don't gimme no sass."

"You sasssed me fust."

The woman raised one hand from the money and made an unexpected side-swipe at Plaster's jaw with her open palm. The blow landed with a smack that jarred the very marrow of his bones and keeled him over the edge of the porch to the ground. As he fell sprawling, the chain tightened and jerked Pearline off her perch and she fell to the ground with a squall. Then for ten minutes there was a Kilkenny cat scrap on the front lawn.

Pearline bit and scratched and pulled hair and tore clothes. She had decidedly the best of the rookus until her unusual activities caused her to get a twist of the chain around her neck. Plaster thanked the Lord and choked her into inaction and submission by the simple process of pretending to escape from her and thus tightening the chain.

When she was choked almost to suffocation, he edged her to the porch, lifted the twenty-five dollars and thirty cents into his own pockets, and released the chain.

When Pearline recovered her breath she dropped flat upon the ground at her feet and howled like a Comanche until the going down of the sun.

Plaster did not attempt to console or quiet her. When he spoke again, he reached out and touched the bawling woman with his foot.

"Git up, idjit!" he exclaimed. "Marse John expecks us to come an' repote to him an' git dese here handcuffs tuck off."

Sheriff John Flournoy was waiting for them as they came across his lawn to the porch where he sat.

Then for half an hour he listened to a tirade of crimination and recrimination which crackled with profane expletives like thorns under a pot. When Plaster paused to breathe, Pearline took up the complaint. When Pearline stopped from exhaustion, Plaster resumed his lamentations.

When the storm of vituperation subsided, Flournoy sat in his chair like a man who had been pounded over the head with a brick. It was some time before he could formulate his ideas. Then he spoke with difficulty:

"I judge from what I have heard that your three days' experience together has convinced you that your tastes are entirely dissimilar and your natures incompatible."

"Yes, suh, dat's c'reck."

"The information you offer conveys to me the impression that a woman loves shadows, but a man loves sunshine and glare; a woman loves dress, but a man loves tobacco; a woman desires daintiness and neatness attended with any degree of discomfort, but a man prefers comfort with no matter how much litter and mess; a woman loves indoor sports, like sewing, and a man loves outdoor sports, like whittling sticks and making the acquaintance of a hound-dog with fleas on his body and mud on his feet; a man loves to sing and to hear himself sing, and the woman prefers to hear some other man sing; a woman wants her female companions with their confidences and their secrets and a man desires his male companions and their secrets, but neither party to the matrimonial alliance is willing that the partner should keep a secret. Am I right as far as I've gone?"

"Dat's right!" they said in positive tones.

"But de fuss part, Marse John, is de money!" the woman shrieked.

"Certainly," Flournoy agreed softly. "Matrimony is always a matter of money."

Then Flournoy took a key from his pocket and opened the bracelets on their wrists. The chain fell at their feet. The bride and bridegroom looked away, each ignoring the presence of the other.

Plaster Sickety thrust both hands into his pockets, brought out twenty-five dollars and thirty cents and laid it into the open palm of the sheriff.

"Fer Gawd's sake, git me a deevo'ce!" he pleaded.

"Make it two, Marse John," the girl urged. "I's plum' nauseated wid dat nigger man."

The bride and bridegroom turned and walked away, choosing different paths and going in opposite directions. They did not look back.

The sheriff stooped and picked up the rattling chain.

Then he went into the house and slammed the door.

The evening and the morning were the third day, and—

FOURTH TALE

PRINCESS OR PERCHERON

BY PERLEY POORE SHEEHAN

SOME queer things had taken place in this same hall—some very queer things; but there were indications that this present affair was going to be queerer yet. The old duke always had been a worthy descendant of his ancestors; like them, a little mad, with flashes of genius, very fine, very brutal, a murderer at heart, with a love for poetry and philosophic speculation.

The guests were already in a smiling tremor of curiosity when they arrived. Some of them whispered among themselves:

"It's on account of the Princess Gabrielle."

"They say the duke is furious."

"Not astonishing. But—a marriage! How can there be a marriage?"

Yet it looked as if a marriage there would be. Manifestly, the hall had been prepared for some such event.

It was a chamber long, lofty and broad, walled and floored with the native Burgundy rock, richly carpeted, hung with tapestry. And down a portion of the length of this there ran a wide table already spread with the viands of a wedding-feast—huge cold pasties, hams and boarheads beautifully jellied, fresh and candied fruits from Spain and Sicily, flagons and goblets of crystal, silver, and gold.

What aroused curiosity and conjecture to the highest point, however, was the discovery that the immense fireplace of the hall had been transformed into a forge. It was a forge complete—bellows and hearth, anvil and tub, hammers and tongs. There was even a smutty-faced imp there to tend the forge fire, which already hissed and glowed as he worked the bellows.

"Aha! So there *was* a smith mixed up in the affair, after all!"

"*Mais oui!* Gaspard, the smith, whose forge is down there on the banks of the Rhone."

"But what does the duke intend to do?"

It was a question which more than one was asking. There was never any forecasting what a whim of the duke might lead him to do even in ordinary circumstances—declare war on France, call a new Crusade. And now, with this menace of scandal in his family!

There in front of the fireplace where the forge had been set up, the valets had placed the ducal chair. All the same, the arrangements had something sinister about them. There fell a period of silence touched with panic. But not for long. Curiosity was too acute and powerful to be long suppressed. The whispering resumed:

"The duke surprised them together—the princess and her smith."

"It looks like the torture for one or both."

"They say the fellow's an Apollo, a Hercules."

"You wait until the duke—"

"Silence! He comes."

One of the large doors toward the farther end of the hall was thrown open, and through this there came a surge of music—hautboys, viols, and flutes. Two guardsmen came in, helmeted, swords drawn, and took up their stations at either side of the door.

There entered the duke.

He looked the philosopher, perhaps, if not the student—tall, bent, bony; a brush of white hair bristling over the top of his high and narrow head; a fleshless face, sardonic and humorous. The guests were pleased to see that his mood was amiable. He came forward smiling, waved his musicians into retreat; and half a dozen valets were assisting him into his chair as he greeted his guests. They all bent the knee to him. Some kissed his hand—and some he kissed, especially those who were fair and of the opposite sex.

If Princess Gabrielle had shown herself fragile in the matter of her affections, well, she had come by her failing honestly.

Seated in his chair, the duke delivered himself of a little pun which convulsed his audience—something about "court and courtship": "*Je fais—la cour.*"

And with no other preliminary he spoke to a page:

"Summon *mademoiselle.*"

Then to another:

"Fetch in the smith."

There was a bitter smile on his face as he sank back into his chair and studied the forge set up in the fireplace. The imp went white under his smudge and worked the bellows until the fire on the hearth was spouting like a miniature Vesuvius.

The wait was brief.

Once more the musicians struck into the royal march of Burgundy, and there was the Princess Gabrielle.

Every one who looked at her must have experienced some thrill of the heart—envy, desire, pure admiration. It was impossible to look at her without some emotion; for she was eighteen, slender, white and passionate; with dusky, copper-colored hair hanging in two heavy curls forward over her brilliantly tender shoulders; and she had a broad, red mouth, and slightly dilated nostrils; dark eyes, liquid and heavily fringed, with disquieting shadows under them.

She came forward with a number of maidens in her train, but she so dominated them that she appeared to be alone. She took her time. She was a trifle rebellious, perhaps. But she was brave, not to say bold. She tossed her head slightly. She smiled. She and her maidens, familiar with the duke's intentions, grouped themselves at one side of the improvised forge.

Every one present was still looking at her when there came a rough command:

"Stand aside!"

A good many of the guests were not in the habit of hearing orders except from the duke himself; but the command came again:

"Stand aside! Let me pass—me and my people!"

At that there was a rapid shifting of the crowd and a whispered cry:

"The smith! It's Gaspard the smith!"

And he attracted even more attention than the princess had done; for, manifestly, here was not only a man who could play the game of love, but could play the game of life and death as well—to shout out like this, and come striding like this into the presence of his ruler.

But he looked the part.

He was all of six feet tall, blond and supple and beautifully fleshed. He was

wearing his blacksmith's outfit of doeskin and leather, but he was scoured and shaven to the pink. His great arms were bare; and the exquisitely sculptured muscles of these slipped and played about under a skin as white as a woman's.

He stood there with his shoulders back, his arms folded, feet apart. But, curiously, there was no insolence in the posture. Insolence is a quality of the little heart, the little soul, and shows itself in the eyes. Gaspard the smith had gentle blue eyes, large, dark, fearless, and with a certain brooding pride in them. There may have been even a hint of virgin bashfulness in them as well, during that moment he glanced at the Princess Gabrielle. Then he had looked at the duke, and all his courage had come back to him, perhaps also a suggestion of challenge.

But neither had the smith come into the ducal presence alone.

There were two old people—a man and a woman, peasants, both of them very poor, very humble, so frightened that they could breathe only with their mouths open; and so soon as they were inside the circle of guests, they had dropped to their knees. The other member of the smith's party would have done the same had he permitted. This was a girl of twenty or so, likewise a peasant, healthy, painfully abashed, but otherwise not notable. To her the smith had given a nudge and a word of encouragement, so that now she stood close to him and back of him.

"Our friends," said the duke, with studied nonchalance, "we are about to present to you the initial operation of a scientific experiment. Like all scientific research, this also should be judged solely by its possible contribution to the advancement of human happiness. Ourselves, we feel that this contribution will be great. God knows it is concerned with a problem that is both elusive and poignant."

All this was rather above Gaspard's head. He turned to the imp at the bellows.

"Stop blowing that fire so hard," he whispered. "You're wasting charcoal."

The duke smiled grimly.

"The problem," he continued, "is this: Can any man and woman, however devoted, continue to love each other if they are too closely held together?"

There was a slight movement among some of the younger gentlemen and ladies present—a few knowing smiles.

"There have always been those who answered *No*; there have always been those who answered *Yes*," the duke went on. "Which were right?" No answer. "My granddaughter here, while having her horse shod some weeks ago, became enamored of this worthy subject of mine." He nodded toward the smith. "She would have him. She would have no one else. We knew how hopeless would be any attempt to impose our will—in an affair of the heart." He smiled gallantly. "We are familiar with the breed."

"Long live the House of Burgundy," cried the chivalrous young Vicomte de Mâcon. But the duke silenced him with a look.

"And now," said the duke, "we wish to test this so great passion of hers—test it under conditions that while apparently extraordinary are none the less classical and scientific. Our experiment is this—"

For the first time since he began to speak the duke now leaned forward, and both his face and his voice took on that quality which made his name a source of trembling from Spain to Denmark.

"Our experiment is this:

"To have the princess and her smith, whom she is so sure she loves, handcuffed and linked together by a ten-foot chain."

II.

THERE was a gasp from the audience. Every one stared at the princess. Even the duke himself. Without turning his head he took her in with his furtive eyes.

"*Mlle. la Princess*," he said icily, "was good enough to insist upon the sacrifice."

At this, a stain of richer color slowly crept up the throat of the Princess Gabrielle; there came a touch of extra fire to her eyes. Perhaps she would have spoken. But the duke hadn't finished yet.

"We'll see whether she loves him so much or not," said the duke. "We'll give them three days of it—three days to go and come as they wish—and to do as they wish—together—always together—bound to each other by their ten-foot chain."

But while the excitement caused by the duke's announcement was still crisping the nerves of every one present, the smith had cast one more glance in the direction of the Princess Gabrielle. And this time their eyes met. There were those who saw a glint of terror—of delicious terror—in the eyes of the princess; and in the eyes of Gaspard a look intended to be reassuring.

Then the smith had unfolded his arms, thrust them forward.

"Wait," he cried.

At that there was a fresh sensation.

For it was seen that one of his wrists—his left—was already encircled by a bracelet of shining steel, forged there of a single piece, and that to the bracelet itself there was forged a link, fine but powerful, and that other links ran back over his shoulder.

"Ha!" snarled the duke. "So you've come prepared!"

"By the grace of God," replied Gaspard the smith, unafraid. He cast a look about him, brought his eyes back to the duke. "*Moi*, Gaspard," he said, "I forge my own chains—always! I'm a smith, I am."

The two old people kneeling just back of him began to sob and to groan. Gaspard turned and looked down at them.

"Shut up," he ordered; "I'm talking."

He smiled at the duke. He explained.

"You see, they're frightened," he said. "When I found out what your highness and your highness's lady-granddaughter were planning up here in the castle, why, I went to these old folks and told them that I wanted their daughter Susette."

"I suppose you loved her," the duke put in with ironical intent.

But the smith saw no reason for irony.

"Eh, *bon Dieu*!" he ejaculated. "And save your highness's respect, we've loved each other ever since we were out of the cradle, we have. So I made the old folks consent. I'm a smith, I am. I forge my own chains. Stand around, Susette! His highness won't hurt you. Look!"

He stepped aside. He gave a gentle thrust to the girl who had been sheltering back of him. The chain rattled.

And there was another cry of surprise.

One of the girl's wrists also was ornamented with a steel handcuff tightly welded. Not only that, but to this also was attached a chain. The smith threw up his arm. It was the same chain that was welded to his own handcuff—ten feet of it, glistening steel, unbreakable.

"There's your ten-foot chain, highness," cried Gaspard. "And it's no trick-chain, either," he added. "It's a chain that will hold. You bet it will. I forged it myself, and I know. It's a chain you couldn't buy. Why? Because—because the iron of it's mixed with love. Nor can it be cut, nor filed, nor broken. I'm a smith, I am. And each link of it I tempered myself—with sweat and blood."

There for a time it was a question—possibly a question in the mind of the duke himself—just how many minutes the smith still had to live. Many a varlet had been executed for less. During a period of about thirty seconds the duke's face went black. Then the blackness dispersed. He slowly smiled.

After all, he wasn't to be cheated of his experiment.

But he answered the question that was in his own mind and the minds of all the others there as he looked at the smith and said:

"Fool, you'll be sufficiently punished—by your own device."

He let his eyes drift again to the Princess Gabrielle.

"And thou," he said, "art sufficiently punished already."

III.

It happened to be a day of late spring; and as Gaspard and this strangely wedded bride of his and her parents came out of the castle, both fed and forgiven, it must have seemed to all of them that this was the most auspicious moment of their lives. The old folks, who had partaken freely of the generous wines pressed upon them, had now passed from their trembling terror to a spirit of frolic. Arm in arm, their sabots clogging, they did a rigadon down the winding road. It was a spirit of tender elation, though, that dominated Gaspard and Susette. They were like two beings distilled complete from the mild and fragrant air, the sweet mistiness of the verdant valley, the purpling solemnity of the Juras.

"What did he mean, his highness?" asked Susette as she pressed the smith's arm closer to her side. "What did he mean that you'd be punished by your own device?"

Gaspard looked down at her, pressed her manacled wrist to his lips, took thought.

"I don't know," he answered gently. "He must be crazy. It's like calling it punishment when a true believer receives the reward of paradise."

"You love me so much as that?"

"*Pardi!*" he ejaculated. "And thou?"

"So much," she palpitated, "so much that when you looked at the princess like that—I wished you were blind!"

At the bottom of the hill, the old folks, Burgundians to the souls of them, happily bade the young couple to be off about their own affairs. They knew how it was with young married people. The old were obstacles—as they themselves well recalled—albeit that was more than twenty years ago.

Said Gaspard fondly: "This business has put me back in my work; but we'll call this a holiday. Shall we go to my cottage or into the forest? I know of a secret place—"

"Into the forest," whispered Susette. "I don't like the forge. It makes me think—think of that cursed princess—and of the work that almost lost you to me." Her blue eyes filmed as she looked up at him. "Oh, Gaspard, I also have dreamed so much—of love—a life of love with thee!"

There was no one there to see. Some day, perhaps, in the far distant future, this part of the world would be thickly populated. But this was not yet the case. Gaspard brought his bride close to his breast, smiled gravely into her upturned face. He kissed her tears away. Sweet Susette! She was such a child! How little she knew of life!

And yet what was that fragile, fluttering, elusive, tiny suggestion of a regret in the back of his brain? Now he saw it; now it was gone—a silver moth of a thought, yet one, some instinct warned him, was there to gnaw a hole in his happiness.

He said nothing about this to Susette, of course; he chased it from his own joy. And this joy was a beautiful, tumultuous thing.

"It's like the source of the Rhone, which I saw one time—this joy of ours," he said with placid rapture. "All sparkling it was, and wild cataracts, and deep places, clean and full of mystery."

"Ah, I want it to be always like this," said Susette.

Gaspard let himself go in clear-sighted thought. They were seated on a grassy

shelf that overhung the great river. The forest hemmed them in on three sides like a wedding-bower fashioned to order; but here they could follow the Rhone for miles—with its drifting barges, its red-sailed shallops, its hamlets, and villages.

"Yes, ever like the Rhone," he said; "but growing, like the Rhone, until it's broad and majestic and strong to carry burdens—"

Susette interrupted him.

"Kiss me," she said. "Kiss me again. No—not like that; like you did a while ago."

And Gaspard, laughing, did as he was bidden. But what was that silver glint of something like a regret, something like a loss, that came fluttering once more across the atmosphere of his thought? Susette, though, kept him diverted. She was forever popping in upon his reflections with innocent, childish questions; and he found this infinitely amusing.

"Did you desire me—more than the princess?"

"Beloved, I have desired you for years."

"Did you think me more beautiful—than she?"

Again Gaspard laughed; but it set him to thinking. He liked to think. He thought at his forge, at his meals, nights when he happened to be awake.

"Love and beauty," he said, "these are created by desire. As a stone-cutter desires what is hidden in the rock, and hews it out and loves the thing he shapes, though it be as ugly as a gargoyle, because of the desire that brought it forth—"

"Do you think that I'm a gargoyle?" queried Susette hastily.

"Certainly not."

"Then, why did you call me one?"

So he had to console her again, and took a certain joy in it, although she protracted the dear, silly dispute by telling him that he had chained her to him simply so that he could torture her, and that he had wanted to spare the princess such suffering, and that therefore it was clear that he loved the princess more.

"Why no," said Gaspard; "as for that, she's really in love with that young *Sieur de Mâcon*."

But thereupon Susette wanted to know how he came to be so well informed as to the contents of the lady's heart. So the smith gave over any attempt to reason, except in the silences of his brain; and just confined his outer activities to cooings and caresses, as Susette would have him do.

Yet his thought would persist.

That was the trail of a great truth he had almost stated back there, about the place held by desire in the origins of love and beauty. He had watched a certain Italian named Botticelli do a mural painting in the duke's private chapel. Lord, there was a passion! He had helped in the building of the cathedral at Sens. Lord, what fervor the builders put into their work! They were all like young lovers.

The smith sat up. It was almost as if he had cornered that glinting moth of doubt.

Yes, they had been like young lovers—*Sieur Botticelli*, in pursuit of the beautiful; the church-builders in pursuit of God. But—and here was the point—what if their desire had been satisfied? The quest would have stopped. The vision of the artist would have faded. The steeple would have fallen down. For desire would have ceased to exist.

"I'm hungry and I'm thirsty," said Susette.

He kissed her pensively. They started home.

IV.

"GASPARD! Gaspard!"

The smith sat up swiftly on his couch.

"What's the matter?" he demanded.

All the same, in spite of certain disquieting dreams, it struck him as sweet and curious to be awakened like that by Susette. But he perceived that she was alarmed.

"Some one hammers at the door," she said.

Then he heard it himself, that thing he had already been hearing obscurely in his sleep.

"Coming!" he yelled. And he smilingly explained to Susette: "It's my old friend, Joseph, the carter. He'd bring his work to me if he had to travel five leagues." And he was for jumping up and running to the door.

"Wait," cried Susette. "I'll have to go with you, and I can't be seen like this."

"That's right," said Gaspard. "That confounded chain! I'd forgotten all about it." So he called out again to his friend, and the two of them held quite a conversation while Susette tried to make herself presentable. But Gaspard turned to her as she shook her hair out for the third time, starting to rearrange it. "Quick!" he urged. "He's in a hurry. One of his horses has cast a shoe."

"You can't show yourself like that, either," cried Susette, playing for time.

"Me?" laughed Gaspard. "I'm a smith. I'd like to see a smith who couldn't show himself in singlet and apron!"

"You look like a brigand."

But he merely laughed: "Joseph won't mind."

And, indeed, Joseph the carter did appear to have but little thought for anything except the work in hand. For that matter, neither, apparently, did Gaspard. After the first few brief civilities and the inevitable jests about the chain, their attention was absorbed at once by the horses. There were four of these—Percherons, huge monsters with shaggy fetlocks and massive feet; yet Joseph and Gaspard went about lifting these colossal hoofs, and considering them as tenderly as if they two had been young mothers concerned with the feet of babes.

At last Susette let out a little cry, and both men turned to look at her.

"I faint," she said weakly.

And Gaspard sprang over and caught her in his arms. He was filled with pity. He was all gentleness.

"Are you sick?" he asked.

"It was the odor of the horses," Susette replied in her small voice.

Joseph the carter seemed to take this as some aspersion on himself. "Those horses don't smell," he asserted stoutly.

But Gaspard signaled him to hold his peace. "You'll be all right in a second or so," he told his wife. He spoke gently; although, as a matter of fact, he himself could find nothing about those magnificent animals to offend the most delicate sensibility. "You'll be all right. You can come into the forge and sit down while I shoe the big gray."

"That will be worse than ever," wailed Susette.

Joseph the carter was an outspoken man, gruff and honest.

"And there's a woman for you," he said, "to be not only wed but welded to a smith! *Nom d'un tonnerre!* Say, then, Gaspard, I'm in a hurry. Shall we start with the gray?"

"Yes," Gaspard answered softly, as he continued to support Susette.

"No, no, no!" cried Susette. "Not to-day! I'm too sick."

"*Mais, chérie,*" Gaspard began.

"You love your work better than you do me," sobbed Susette.

"*Nom d'un pourceau!*" droned Joseph.

"But this work is important," Gaspard argued desperately. "The gray has not only cast a shoe, but the shoes on the others are loose. They've got to be attended to. It's work that will bring me in a whole *écu*."

"I don't care," said Susette. "I can't stand the smell of those horses, and I could never, never bear the smell of the hot iron on their hoofs."

"But I'm a smith," argued Gaspard.

It was his ultimate appeal.

"I told you that you loved your work more than you did me," whimpered Susette, beginning to cry. "'*I'm a smith; I'm a smith*'—that's all you've talked about since you got me in your power."

Joseph the carter went away. He did so, shaking his head, followed by his shining Percherons, which were as majestic as elephants, but as gentle as sheep. There was a tugging at Gaspard's heart as he saw them go. Such horses! And no one could shoe a horse as could he. He looked down at Susette's bowed head as she lay there cuddled in his arms. That despairing cry was again swelling in his chest: "But I'm a smith." He silenced it. He stroked the girl's head.

As he did so, he was mindful as never before of the clink and jangle of the chain.

V.

"WHAT do you want me to do?" he asked that afternoon as they lay out in the shade of the poplars along the river-bank.

"I want you to love me," she answered.

"I do love you. But we can't live on love—can we, Susette?—however pleasant that would be. I've got to work."

"Ah, your *sacré* work!"

"Still, you'll admit that you can't pick up *écus* in the road."

"You're thinking still of that miserable carter."

"No; but I am thinking of his horses. Somebody's got to shoe them. You can't let them go lame—or be lamed by a bungler. I could have done that job as it should have been done."

"But I tell you," declared Susette, pronouncing each word with an individual stress. "I can't support the grime and the odors and the racket of your forge. You ought to find some work that I do like. We could collect wild salads together—pick wild-flowers and sell them—something like that."

Gaspard sighed.

"But a man's work is his work," he averred.

"There you go again," said Susette, and the accusation was all the more damning in that it was spoken not in anger, but in grief. "Now that I've given myself to you—done all that you wished—you want to get rid of me; you want me to die."

"Haven't I told you a thousand times," cried Gaspard softly and passionately, "that I love you more than any man has ever loved any woman? Haven't I spent whole days and nights—yes, years—of my life desiring you? Haven't I proven it? Come into my arms, Susette. Ah, when I have you in my arms like this—"

"And it's only like this that I know happiness, my love," breathed the girl. "Yes; I'm jealous! Jealous of everything that can take you from me, body or spirit, if even for a moment. All women are like that. We live in jealousy. What's work? What's ambition, honor, duty, gold as compared with love?"

But late that night Gaspard the smith roused himself softly from his couch. He lay there leaning on his elbow and stared out of the window of his cottage. Susette stirred at his side, undisturbed by the metallic clinking. Otherwise the night was one of engulfing, mystical silence.

Just outside the cottage the great river Rhone flowed placid and free in the light of the young moon. Up from the river-bottoms ran the vine-clad slopes of Burgundy as fragrant as gardens. There was no wind. It was all swoon and mystery.

"Lord God!" cried Gaspard the smith in his heart.

It was a prayer as much as anything—an inspiration that he couldn't get otherwise into words.

He was of that race of artist-craftsmen whose forged iron and fretted steel would continue to stir all lovers of beauty for centuries to come.

"It's true," that inner voice of his spoke again, "that desire is the driving force of the world. 'Twas desire in the heart of God that led to creation. 'Tis so with us, His creatures—desire that makes us to love and embellish. But when desire is satisfied, then desire is dead, and then—and then—"

And yet, as he lay there, buffeted by an emotion which he either would not or could not express, his eyes gradually focused on the castle of the great Duke of Burgundy up there on the top of the hill—washed in moonlight, dim and vast; and it was as if he could see the Princess Gabrielle at her casement, kneeling there, communing with the night as he was doing.

Did she weep?

He had caught that message in her eyes as she had looked at him up there in the castle hall—had seen the same message before.

But never had she looked so beautiful—or as she looked now in retrospect—skin so white, mouth so tender, shape so stately, yet so slim and graceful. Oddly enough, thought of her now filled him with a vibrancy, with a longing.

And brave! Hadn't she shown herself to be brave though—to stand up like that there before her grandfather, him whom all Europe called Louis the Terrible, and declare herself ready to be welded to the man of her choice! She wouldn't faint in the presence of horses! And where couldn't a man go if led by a guardian angel like that? Slaves had become emperors; blacksmiths had forged armies, become the architects of cathedrals.

His breathing went deep, then deeper yet. The sweat was on his brow. He sat up. He seized the chain in his powerful hands, made as if he were going to tear it asunder.

But after that moment of straining silence he again lifted his face.

"*Seigneur-Dieu*," he panted; "if—if I only had it to do over again!"

VI.

"It's Gaspard the smith," said the frightened page. "He craves the honor of an interview."

The duke looked up from his parchment.

"Gaspard the smith?"

The duke was seated before the fireplace in the hall. The forge had been removed; and instead there were some logs smoldering there, for the morning was cool. But his glance recalled the circumstances of his last encounter with the smith. The watchful page was quick to seize his cue.

"He comes alone," the page announced.

The duke gave a start, then began to chuckle.

"*Tiens! Tiens!* He comes alone! 'Tis true, this is the time limit I set. Send the creature in."

And his highness continued to laugh all the time that the page was gone. But he laughed softly, for he was alone. Presently he heard a subdued clinking of steel. He greeted his subject with a sly smile.

Most subjects of Louis the Terrible would have been overjoyed to be received by their sovereign so graciously. But Gaspard the smith showed no special joy. He wasn't nearly so proud, either, as he had been that other time he had appeared before his lord. He bent his knee. He remained kneeling until the duke told him to get up. The duke was still smiling.

"So my three days were enough," said his highness.

"Enough and sufficient," quoth the smith.

Now that he was on his feet again he was once more the man. He and the duke looked at each other almost as equals.

"Tell me about it," said Louis.

"Well, I'll tell you," Gaspard began; "you see, I'm a smith."

"But incapable of forging a chain strong enough to hold a woman."

"I'm not so sure," Gaspard replied. "It was a good chain."

He put out his left wrist and examined it. The steel handcuff was still there. Up and back from it ran the chain which the smith had been carrying over his shoulder. He hauled the chain down. He displayed the other end of it, still ornamented by the companion bracelet.

"What happened? How did she get out of it?" queried the duke.

"She got thin," Gaspard responded with melancholy. "She didn't want me to work. She wanted the money that I could earn. Yes. She even wanted me to work. But it had to be her kind of work; something—something—how shall I say it?—something that wouldn't interfere with our love."

"And you didn't love her?"

"Sure I loved her," flared the smith. "Eh—*bon Dieu!* I wouldn't have coupled up with her if I hadn't loved her; but, also, I loved something else. I loved my work. I'm a smith. I'm a shoer of horses, a forger of iron, a worker in steel. I'm what the good God made me, and I've the good God's work to do!"

"So, after a certain amount of honeymoon I had to get back to my forge. Joseph the carter, his Percherons; who could shoe them but me?"

"And she didn't like that?"

"No. When I made her sit in my forge she pined and whined and refused to eat. I was crazy. But I did my work. And this morning when I awoke I found that she had slipped away."

"You were already enchained," said his highness, "by your work."

The smith misunderstood.

"You can see it was no trick chain," he said, holding up the chain he himself had forged and playing with the links.

"Aye," said the duke, for he loved these philosophic disquisitions, when he was in the mood for them. "Aye, chains are the nature of the universe. The planets are chained. The immortal soul is chained to the mortal body. The body itself is chained to its lusts and frailties."

"I'm a smith," said Gaspard, "and I want to work."

"We're not happy when we are chained," the duke continued to reflect aloud. "But I doubt that we'd be happier were our chains to disappear. No matter." He regarded Gaspard the smith with real benignancy. "At least you've proven the fatal quality of one particular chain—the thing I wanted to prove. And—you've saved the princess."

"'Twas of her I wanted to speak," Gaspard spoke up. "This is a good chain. I forged it myself."

"Yes, I know you're a smith," said the duke.

"Well, then," said Gaspard, "I've been thinking. Suppose—now that I've still got it on me—that we try it on the princess, after all." He noticed the duke's look of amazement. "I'm willing," said Gaspard. "I'm willing to have another try—"

"*Dieu de bon Dieu!*" quoth the duke. "Never content!" He recovered himself. He felt kindly toward the smith. "Haven't you heard?" he demanded. "The princess has forged a chain of her own. She eloped with that young *Sieur de Mâcon* the same day you declined to chain her to yourself."

(The end.)

The Broken Strand

by A.F. Harlow

CHAPTER I.

COPPER!

THE sun had evidently reached its zenith, but it was still far to their right as they faced the east, apparently poised right above Whitestone Bald, some twenty miles or more to southward—which meant that the season was late September. The air was mellow, clear and still, after the fashion of the southern Appalachians in early fall. Here and there a sourwood tree had suddenly flamed into crimson or a hickory was slowly yellowing; but the greater part of the long, billowing, wooded slopes was still deeply green.

The two young men who had just lunched beside a mountain brook that tinkled down from a spring five hundred feet up the slope brushed the crumbs from their corduroy suits, put certain food packets and cooking utensils back into their rucksacks, shouldered the packs, and struck out along the trail which climbed gradually and with many dips and zigzags to the crest of Little Wildcat Ridge.

"Wonderful weather, Royce!" sighed the brown-eyed one in great contentment.

"Can't be beaten, Frank," replied the other, who had an eager face and bluish-green eyes which held certain inscrutable glints. He picked up a chip of stone, drew an ever-ready microscope from the breast pocket of his shirt, and examined the fragment with interest so absorbing that he slowed up and stopped.

"Come on, man!" called Frank Elton, who loitered a few paces farther on, await-

ing him. "You're delaying the whole procession."

"Just a minute—" muttered the other.

"I'm darned glad I'm not a mining engineer or a geologist!" grumbled Elton good-naturedly. "Keeps your eyes on the ground all the time. I don't believe you ever really enjoy the scenery. Here we have the finest landscapes in eastern America spread out before us, and you see nothing but dirt and rocks."

Royce Latimer laughingly threw down the chip of gneiss, thrust his microscope into his pocket, and hurried after his friend. "I came on this hike quite as much to study the formation of these mountains as to enjoy the scenery," said he. "You never know when you are going to run across something really valuable in the mineral line. These mountains weren't made for nothing."

"I didn't know that there were any minerals of any great value in this immediate region."

"Nothing has been found right where we stand now, but that doesn't mean that it isn't here. Much valuable stuff has been found in the better-explored parts of the mountains. In fact, east Tennessee is full of it. There are big iron deposits northeast and southwest of us, you know.

"The coal-fields don't extend up quite this far, but there are marble and bauxite and dozens of other things dotted around here and there. You don't think of Tennessee as a copper-producing State, do you? When copper is mentioned, you think only of Michigan and Montana and

Arizona and Utah. Yet down here near Ducktown, only a few miles southwest of us, is a little patch of ground which may be regarded as one of the very important copper districts of the United States."

"Well, keep your eyes on the rocks, then. Maybe you will yet—but soft! Whom have we here? The mysterious stranger!"

Along a converging path, of whose approach they had been unaware, a man was coming on horseback; they could just see his body and the bobbing head of his horse above the laurel bushes. His long, drooping, black mustache and broad, black felt hat were typical of the region; but he was not a mountain man, for he wore a fairly good suit of store clothes, all of one pattern, albeit the fit was none of the best. Discovering the young men, he rather hastily buttoned his coat.

"Good evenin', gentlemen," he drawled in characteristic Southern greeting (it was not yet two o'clock). The young men replied in kind, and, finding that their paths coincided, the three ambled along together.

With typical rustic curiosity he presently, by delicate questioning, drew from Elton and Latimer statements that they were respectively lawyer and mining engineer; that they were from New York; and that they tramped through the mountains merely for recreation. In turn he admitted that his name was Burgett, and explained with some elaboration that his errand into the mountains concerned some cattle which were being pastured on the rich white clover of one of the "balds."

"Jove, what a glorious view!" exclaimed Elton in a tone that was almost reverent. They had reached the crest of Little Wildcat Ridge, and were following it as it rose steadily toward a peak of which it was an offshoot. A bare spot where a fire had crossed the ridge two years before suddenly gave them a marvelous outlook to northward.

The ground pitched steeply from their feet into a gorge fifteen hundred feet deep, along whose rocky bottom writhed and boiled the upper waters of the Teloah River, here a mere attenuated creek. They could see two short stretches of it, little deep-green patterns laced with lines of white

foam, and so far below that it seemed frozen into immobility.

Across the gorge and a bit up-stream rose a blunt, round hump of a mountain whose face, on the side next the torrent, was a sheer cliff, in places four and five hundred feet in height. Around and beyond it stretched a heaving sea of blue and purple mountains, reaching to dim, shadowy peaks which slumbered on the horizon, so near the color of the sky that they all but vanished in their background.

The picture was vast, but peaceful and harmonious. A few wisps of cumulus cloud seemed painted on the sky, so motionless were they. There was no movement save the slow curving sweep of an eagle over the abyss, no sound save the whisper of a small vagrant breeze through the stunted trees and bushes around them.

Mr. Burgett examined the prospect with surprised interest. "You can see a considerable piece from here," he admitted. "But of course you can see further from the big tops like Thunderhead and Gregory's Bald." Then, pointing to the rounded hump with the precipitous face, he volunteered: "That there's what they call Big Bluff Mountain."

Elton, who had been searching the landscape through field-glasses, pointed to a spot across the gorge and farther up-stream. "There seems to be a cabin. Second one we've seen to-day."

"Old man Rawn's," explained Burgett.

"I suppose these fellows just own a little patch of land around their own huts," suggested Latimer. "But how did they acquire it?"

"A good many of 'em don't own a foot of land," replied Burgett. "Some of 'em are renters and some are just squatters."

"Squatters!" exclaimed Latimer. "Well, well! I didn't know we had squatters any more. I've read of them in connection with our early history, but I thought they were extinct."

"There's a heap of 'em in these mountains."

"How long has old man Rawn been—er—squattin' in that picturesque place?"

Burgett shifted his cud and pondered,

"Five or six years at least, that I know of."

"Just what is the legal status of a squatter?" pursued Latimer. "Why are they allowed to live peaceably on the land?"

Burgett drew a long breath, as one who has a task of proportions before him. "A heap of this mountain land," he began, "belongs to non-resident owners or is in dispute—nobody knows who owns some of it. Back in early days, when folks was takin' out land from the gover'ment, a feller could step into the land offices at Sparty or Cleveland and get the clerk to enter up a thousand or five thousand acres of land for him by him just givin' the metes and bounds.

"The clerk didn't know much about where it was, and he didn't care. And if the next day or the next year some other man come in and entered a track of land that partly or entirely covered the other feller's, why, the clerk didn't know the difference. The corners were mostly trees, with a few rocks and hills and unknown creeks. You may or may not believe it, gentlemen, but land has been legally described in deeds as cornerin' on a pine knot stuck in the ground.

"I've seen a deed which described the boundary of a piece of land as 'beginnin' at a gum-tree at the foot of an impossible cliff on the eastern side of Walden's Ridge.' Now, as most of the eastern face of Walden's Ridge is a more or less impossible cliff, my idy is that that corner 'd be hard to find.

"Another boundary is described as beginnin' at a rock in the middle of Walden's Ridge, opposite the mouth of a creek which empties into the Sequatchie River about ten miles away. Do you think you could find that rock?"

Both young men laughingly disclaimed any such ability. They were walking abreast now, the trail having been widened by the fire's destruction of the underbrush. Burgett's horse plodded along behind.

"Why, I've even seen a description of a piece of land which had this in it—'thence south 35 degrees 10 minutes west 26 poles, passing into John Fredericks's turnip-patch at 17 poles and out of said patch at 18½

poles'—as if John Fredericks was goin' to raise turnips in that one little particular dab o' ground for the rest of time."

The shouts of laughter vented by his audience fully repaid the expositor, who went on:

"All this enterin' and reenterin' of land just piled up trouble for future generations. There's old land lawyers here in Tennessee who've got rich off o' those mix-ups arisin' right there in the land offices. Why, there's some patches of land in these Tennessee and Kentucky mountains that have titles on 'em twelve deep!"

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Elton, with the prim city lawyer's abhorrence of such laxity. "It hardly seems possible here in America."

"Well, it's the truth I'm tellin' you. And a heap of this land was taken up by folks livin' away off in other States, or who went away after they patented it, and sorter forgot about it. Some paid the taxes on it, and some didn't. Some looks after their land now and collects rents on it, and some don't.

"A whole passel of this land around us, includin' Big Bluff Mountain and Rawn's place, belongs to some heirs away off in Boston or somewhere up there, and I don't suppose any of 'em ever saw it. Old Cap'n Merridew, down at Byrdsville, is supposed to be lookin' after it for 'em, but he's gettin' old and doty and half asleep most of the time. He's liable to let some of those squatters set around on that land until they perfect a possession title."

"What constitutes a possession title?" asked Elton.

"If a man fences a certain tract of land or builds a house on it and maintains open and undisputed possession of it for seven years under color of title, he acquires a clear right and title to that land. By color of title I mean that he must have some sorter papers for the land, to start with—a deed or a will or something.

"His deed may start from a younger or newer gover'ment grant than any other that covers the same land; but his seven years' possession gives him a clear title over all the older grants. Of course his claim is generally disputed by the rightful owner of the

land, and there's generally a chancery suit or a money compromise.

"Some of these squatters have some awful fake claims to land they're livin' on, but in many cases the owner pays 'em a good sum of money for a quit-claim deed, to avoid the trouble and expense of draggin' the thing through the courts for several years."

"Mr. Burgett," said Latimer, after a moment, "what's the best way to get down to the bed of the creek and across it? I'd like to get a closer look at that big cliff, and besides, our way lies more to northward. Maybe we can hang up at old man Rawn's to-night."

"There's a dim trail turns off right ahead of us and goes anglin' down into the gulf," replied Burgett. "It follers along the stream for a piece and then comes out on the other side right below Rawn's house."

In passing, it may be mentioned that it is inadvisable for a stranger to leave the trail in these mountains for a walk of any distance, as the very heavy undergrowth renders the constant danger of getting lost very serious.

On higher elevations there are impenetrable balsam thickets, and, lower down, rhododendron jungles which are well-nigh as impassable, to say nothing of sickening tangles of blackberry, laurel, and poison ivy, cliffs, and slopes which are one vast rock-pile.

Latimer and Elton had been warned before entering the mountains of the advisability of sticking to the trail.

Presently the fork in the path was reached. A friendly hand-shake was exchanged, Burgett explaining that he must continue along the crest of the ridge in order to meet some herders on a mountain pasture that evening.

"Be careful what you say and do around old man Rawn's," he cautioned. "I sorter suspect him of knowin' somethin' about the moonshine business."

He looked down with a faint flush over his cheek-bones as if he had said too much, then with a wave of the hand was away along the upper trail.

"Rather interesting fellow," commented

Latimer as they scrambled down the rocky path.

"Royce, do you know what I think?" queried Elton, looking back over his shoulder.

"No," bantered Latimer, "but I am surprised and delighted to learn that you think. What do you think, by the way?"

Frank jerked his thumb in the direction of the receding stranger and said: "Revenue officer!"

Latimer, who had an impish fancy for mischief and novelty, halted in his tracks and exclaimed:

"Say, I believe you're right! I'll wager he's got a raid on, and the fellows he's going to meet up on the mountain are some of his posse. By George, I'd like to go with him!"

"Well, you can't—that's a cinch! You'd probably run, anyhow, at the first sign of trouble. These mountaineers are bad medicine when you interfere with their booze, I'm told."

The trail led down to the course of the Teloah, wandered along the bank a while, then vanished apparently in the rocky bed of the stream, which was here a series of shallow rapids. Hopping from stone to stone across the water, the travelers endeavored to pick up the trail again, but met only a dense laurel thicket, so continued up the course of the stream.

As Latimer stumbled along over the loose stones near the water's edge, his eye was attracted by a small, greenish flake which was plainly of an unusual sort. He picked it up eagerly and whipped out his little glass. One awestruck word escaped him as he peered through the lens at the dull-looking chip in his palm:

"Copper!"

Still gazing at the fragment, he impulsively put out his hand toward Elton, who was in front, and called: "Say, Frank, look here!" But the shouting of the stream beside them prevented the other from hearing his call. Scarcely had he uttered it when his face changed—a sly look crept over it and he looked furtively at Elton to see whether the latter had heard him. Satisfied, he quickly thrust the specimen into an inner pocket, then looked eagerly

about him, muttering: "Where can it have come from?"

It might have been washed down the creek in successive freshets, but it could not have come very far in that manner. Perhaps these very banks, so thickly clad with verdure, held the priceless secret. Possibly the mysterious particle had fallen from the rocky face of Big Bluff Mountain, which upreared itself five hundred feet in air only a few yards from the water's edge. And again, perhaps the chip of ore had merely been dropped there by some one who had brought it for many miles—possibly even from Ducktown.

He heard Elton calling impatiently, and hurried forward to join him. Frank had found where the trail crept up out of the bed of the stream and serpentine its way among the thickets along the bank. Latimer followed him, thoughtful and silent, his gaze darting keenly this way and that. After continuing a mile or more up-stream, the path led swiftly up the side of the gulch, and in another ten minutes the travelers halted at the gate of Aaron Rawn, the squatter of Big Bluff Mountain.

CHAPTER II.

OLD AARON RAWN.

BEFORE continuing, it may be explained that the statement that Latimer and Elton stood at the gate of Aaron Rawn is a mere poetical usage. As a matter of fact, the movable barrier which clumsily protected the front entrance to Aaron's yard was known as "the bars," and consisted of two dogwood poles at heights of perhaps two and four feet from the ground, which served the purpose of keeping the family cow and mule out or in, as variously desired.

A flock of half a dozen gaunt, flap-eared hounds came ranting out to the fence in their customary humbug style, making a great uproar of barking, but intending no harm whatever to the strangers. A tall mountaineer with long, tangled iron-gray hair and beard promptly appeared at the door of the shambling log cabin and strode toward the bars, bawling for silence and

kicking right and left at the dogs, many of his strokes being dodged, however, by the canines with a skill acquired through long experience. Having subdued the chorus a bit, he let down the upper bar and invited the strangers to enter.

The two introduced themselves to old Aaron—for it was he—Elton with a heartiness born of a genuine interest in the mountaineer, and Latimer with a winning smile which he could assume whether charmed or not.

"Come in and set down," said the old man. "Nancy, bring out some chairs."

Two women had been furtively regarding the strangers from the shadows inside the house. The younger now came forth shyly, with two low, home-made chairs, which she placed on the bare earth of the dooryard, which was packed almost to the hardness of stone.

The attention of the young men was attracted at once. She was lithe and supple as a young panther, and, what was remarkable for a mountain girl, her face was an excellent oval in shape and possessed a certain mild beauty, though very grave, as are all mountaineers. The skin was tanned but clear, and flushed prettily as she awkwardly acknowledged the young men's graceful salutations. The gentle brown eyes looked down modestly, but not before she had caught an amused glance of the city men at her bare feet as she came out of the door.

Now, as she turned to retire, she had not the courage to mount the two steps to the door and thus give those sophisticated eyes a shocking rear view of her legs; so she slunk around the corner of the house, trying to shrivel herself up into as nearly invisible an atom as possible.

Old Rawn seated himself on a block of wood lying against a tree, while Elton and Latimer took the proffered chairs, and the two parties then began to question each other, the city men seeking information about the mountains, the host questioning the guests about themselves. The mountaineer is always consumed with curiosity to know why "furriners"—that is, people from outside the mountains—are traveling through the wilds, and he is the more deep-

ly intrigued when men voluntarily shoulder heavy packs and toil over the wilderness trails on foot, claiming to do it for pleasure.

"But ye make a heap o' money by it, too, I reckon?" hinted the old man, looking keenly out of the corners of his black eyes at the hikers.

"Not a cent," laughed Elton. "Instead, this trip will cost me two hundred dollars if it costs a cent, and all I get out of it is pleasure and good health. But it's worth the money at that."

Rawn chewed upon this answer silently for a while, but was still unconvinced. Meanwhile, Latimer planned a ruse to see Nancy again, and presently asked the old man if they might have a drink.

"Nancy," called her father, "bring these hyer men some water."

Old Aaron did not mean to be rude. He knew no more courteous way in which to voice his request to his daughter, and he had probably never used the word "gentleman" in his life.

After some delay Nancy appeared, dreadfully conscious of her naked feet, bearing water in a small tin pail which had formerly held a cheap cottonseed-oil shortening. The guests, much to their amusement, drank for the first time in their experience from a gourd.

As Latimer held the vessel to his lips and looked with laughing eyes over its rim at Nancy, she admitted to herself that he was very handsome; and when he handed it back to her with some well-turned remark about the excellent water's being enhanced in deliciousness by the fair hand that gave it, she thought that she had never in her life seen any one so mannerly or so engaging.

Just as this little by-play was in progress the party became aware of a young man in rough mountain attire who stood outside the fence, and whose level gaze was fixed with solemn concentration upon the two strangers. His face was hardly handsome, but it was of good proportions and had resolute, intelligent lines which made it well worth a second look.

"Howdy, Tom," saluted the man of the house.

"Howdy, Aaron," responded the young man, without the slightest change of expression.

"Hain't ye comin' in?"

Tom made no verbal answer, but gravely swung first one leg and then the other over the low fence, utterly ignoring the bars. The host spoke no word of introduction for the new guest. Introductions were practically unknown in his set, and it did not occur to him that such a ceremony was in order.

Elton and Latimer solved the situation by rising in their courteous way and presenting themselves. Pressed thus to a declaration, Tom admitted rather diffidently that his name was Sterrett.

The party reseated themselves, Tom silently refusing Elton's proffered chair to find a seat on an old bee-gum which had split its full length and so lost its usefulness. The talk went on, the old man and the guests alternately catechizing each other while Tom for the most part listened in silence, turning his keen blue eyes from this speaker to that.

Presently Aaron cleared his throat and said apologetically:

"I hates ter devil you men ter death a axin' questions, but you know we-uns lives up in the mountains, whar we don't ever hyer nothin' scurcely, and I wanter know how that thar war away off yender is gittin' on."

It was the fall of 1915, and news of the great world conflict had penetrated even to the farthest peaks of the Appalachians, albeit few of the mountaineers had any but the vaguest ideas of its causes, its scope, or its meaning.

Elton took up the burden of the narrative and roughly sketched the positions and military operations of all the belligerent countries. Passing from one front to another, he described the deadlock of the Teutons with the French and English, the prostration of Belgium and Serbia, the terrible mountain fighting of Italy and Austria, and the mighty onslaught of Russia. When he finally paused, Aaron seemed to think that there was still a link missing.

"An' what's Europe a doin'?" he inquired.

Elton, disconcerted, hesitated a moment, groping for the starting point of an adequate explanation, when Latimer, with an impish twinkle, struck in and proceeded to describe in detail a series of astonishingly military successes achieved by a state by the name of Europe. His audience, unblinking, drank in his story with the deepest absorption. As a vivid and forceful historian, he appeared to them to be rather superior to Elton.

Aaron drew a long breath when Latimer had brought his romance down to date.

"I reckon you men have been over in them countries, an' heerd the kings an' presidents an' sech talk; an' I wanter ask you, mister, ef you think hit's likely that this hyar country will git br'iled up in that thar war."

"Heaven knows!" from Elton; and "I hope not!" from Latimer.

"We have enough to do," pursued Elton, "keeping things straight on the Mexican border."

This brought on more questions; and the mountain men were surprised but not perturbed to learn that we feared trouble with our Mexican neighbors. They held that swarthy race in rather low esteem.

"We whupped 'em once before, didn't we?" inquired Aaron, with asperity.

"Yes, we did."

"It was in my daddy and gran'daddy's time," mused the old man. "One er my uncles went ter the war. Lord! Lord! I've heerd him tell. 'bout'n it many a time."

"Hit don't look it orter take many soldiers ter frail out sech a passel of onregenerate critters," was Tom's opinion.

"Hit wouldn't ef they warn't so underhanded," explained Aaron patiently. "I ain't never seed no Mexicans, ner yit had any dealin's with 'em; but from all I kin hear, I hev corncluded that they jest natchelly orter be wiped out—seed, breed, an' generation!"

"Waal," spoke Tom, with decision, "I hain't a pinin' ter go thar ner nowhar else ter war, but ef the President gits in a tight place, w'y, I'll go an' help him out the best I kin."

The sun was nearing the crest of Wildcat

Ridge. Long, thin beams of yellow light stole through the trees, to lie silently on the gray logs of the cabin, and to throw an aureole around the shaggy head of the old mountaineer. The opposite side of the gorge was a pool of deep purple shadow.

"I wonder if we couldn't arrange to stay overnight with you?" remarked Elton. "We've come a long way to-day, and have a long walk before us to-morrow, so we'd be glad to sleep in a bed if we can."

Aaron pondered the question with mountain deliberation, fingering his tangled beard. "I reckon you-uns kin stay," he replied at length, "ef you kin put up with sech ez we-uns hev to offer."

"Oh, there'll be no trouble about that," exclaimed Latimer. "I'm sure you could accommodate us as nicely as we could wish."

Here Tom rose, and without a word to the others of the party—so little versed was he in the amenities of polite society—passed around the house, and confronted Nancy as she was about to go out to her milking.

"What was that thar feller grinnin' at you about a while ago?" he inquired in a tone of mild reproach.

Nancy bridled immediately.

"I dunno what, less'n hit was because I hev got sech a saphead a waitin' on me," she replied crisply; from which remark it might have been inferred that Tom was Nancy's steady company—perhaps even her fiancé.

Tom flushed, but held his temper well. "Hit don't pleasure me none ter see these hyer sassy-lookin' furriners grinnin' at you like a 'possum, an' givin' you ther soft sawder. They don't mean you no good by it."

Nancy tossed her head. "I reckon I kin take keer o' myself," she asserted, "ontil somebody gives you the job o' doin' it."

Tom stood silently a moment, picking at a splinter on one of the logs of the house. He was of more even temper than the average mountaineer, and he was always especially tolerant in dealing with Nancy, though that gentle maiden had seldom tested his patience. He fully appreciated the fact that every additional word of discus-

sion of the present subject would add tinder to a flame already too high.

"Well, I got to be gettin' home," said he at length, turning away abruptly. "Far'-well, Nancy."

"Good evenin' to ye," she replied in a milder voice, and her eye dwelt upon him with a softened expression as he strode away up the slope until he was hidden by the high hedge of okra and sunflowers along the garden fence.

Anxiety quickened Tom's gait, for he knew that it would be dark when he reached his cabin, over on Elijah's Creek, there would be reproaches from his mother for his neglect of his evening work; but it seemed to him that the profound dissertations upon the greatest war of all the ages, to which he had just listened, were ample compensation for any feminine brow-beating from which a man might suffer.

When Nancy left the rear of the house with a tin bucket on her arm and crossed a side fence into a thinly wooded enclosure where an old red cow had stood complaining for some ten minutes past, the young men observed that she had donned her shoes and stockings, since her last appearance; coarse cowhide shoes they were, and home-knitted stockings, but they gave infinite relief to her modesty.

Old Rawn arose, and, muttering something about feeding "the beasts," made his way toward a tottering log pen near by, which did duty as the domicile of a gaunt, weather-beaten mule.

"Not bad, eh?" said Latimer, with a wink, nodding in the direction of Nancy.

"Unusually pretty for a mountain girl," admitted Elton, a little stiffly. The acquaintance of the two men had not been of very long duration, and Elton was beginning to discover certain traits in Latimer that seemed to rub his sensibilities the wrong way.

"I think I'll come back here and stay a while for my health," said Latimer laughingly, leaning far back in his chair.

"Royce, you're going to make a fool of yourself, I'm afraid," grumbled the other. But sure enough, at the supper-table, Latimer remarked: "Mr. Rawn, this is quite a healthy neighborhood, isn't it?"

The old man peered up at him under his shaggy eyebrows. "Hit is fur them ez 'tends to the'r own business."

Latimer laughed jovially. "Well, I haven't any desire to attend to anybody else's. I was just thinking of asking you if I couldn't board here with you a while, or allow me to bring a tent and camp on your place, perhaps taking some of my meals with you. I'll pay you whatever you think it's worth. My health is none of the best, but I believe if I spent a few months in this fine mountain air I'd be as good as new. What do you say?"

Rawn did not reply immediately. His curiosity regarding these young men bordered on suspicion. Latimer appeared to be in excellent health. What was his game? He might even be a revenue spy. Still—he talked so plausibly; Aaron had known a man once who spent a year in the mountains for his health; and then there was the money! His suspicions were not proof against the promise of a steady income.

"I reckon we mought make some per-visions," he announced formally.

The cabin consisted of two rooms and a loft. In what might be called the living-room was a rickety wooden bed in which Latimer and Elton slept that night. The family, four in all, which included Aaron, his wife—a thin, timid woman in the fifties—Nancy, and "Bill," a gawky boy of fourteen, climbed the ladder to the loft, where the visitors supposed that there must be at least one more bed; but from certain shuffling sounds on the bare boards which hung so closely above their heads, it was evident to them that half of the family were sleeping on the floor.

The simple but heavy breakfast of the Rawn ménage was eaten about sunrise. The young men's eyes met in a flicker of amusement when they discovered that fried cabbage was one of the leading items of the bill of fare. After breakfast the travelers prepared to resume their journey; but when Elton, fully accoutered, stepped out into the yard and looked about for his companion, that worthy had vanished.

Had Elton peeped around the corner of the big stone chimney at the end of the

house, he might have beheld an interesting situation. Latimer, watching for his chance, had encountered Nancy outside and drawn her into that angle, where he now stood, clasping her hand and throwing into his velvety barytone voice all the winning sweetness that he knew very well how to command.

"So this is good-by, Nancy! But I'll come again. I couldn't stay away."

Poor Nancy could only look up and look down again, flushing deeply and murmuring, "Good-by!"

"Child, do you know how pretty you are?" exclaimed the gallant in a lower tone.

Nancy only blushed the redder and made a feeble and vain attempt to free her hand.

"Royce!" shouted Elton in the front yard.

"Good-by!" whispered Latimer. "Remember, I'll come again in the spring, little girl. Good-by!"

With Old World courtliness he bowed over her hand and touched his lips to the back of the roughened fingers; then, with one last pressure, he was gone, leaving Nancy leaning against the wall of the cabin in a daze, her heart pounding in an ecstasy that it had never known before.

CHAPTER III.

SPRING-TIME.

IT seemed to Nancy that winter—the gloomy, foggy winter of the Smokies—had never dragged its way across the mountains so slowly. She looked forth upon the universe with a quickened interest. For once in her straitened life she had something to look forward to. Nancy knew nothing of bejeweled courtiers or fairy princes, but in her simple consciousness the godlike male who had flashed across her path and vanished again occupied a much higher place than either of those favorite old characters ever did in song or story. Moreover, he had disturbed her whole dull routine of existence. He had made her dissatisfied.

As she lifted her eyes to the mountain battlements about her, which shut in the only world that she knew, the wings of her

soul beat against those walls even as the wings of a newly trapped bird lash against the bars of its cage.

Tom Sterrett, trudging toilsomely through the snow that winter from Elijah's Creek to the cabin above the Teloah, often found her distraught and unresponsive. Tom and Nancy had been promised to each other for several years, and had kept their troth with unswerving constancy. Nancy was now nearly twenty, and therefore, from a mountain standpoint, fast becoming an old maid.

It was a matter of common knowledge that Tom's mother was the cause of the delay in the consummation of their happiness. The humors of that lady were publicly admitted to be somewhat difficult. In fact, Tom's patience was widely lauded, because he was able to live with her and still preserve a sober and tranquil demeanor.

In addition to her temperamental causticity, Mrs. Sterrett had contracted a violent dislike for the whole Rawn family, and opined that Tom was coveting an alliance with a generation of vipers; which disaster she aimed to prevent, if the Lord permitted her to retain her strength and senses.

It was manifestly impracticable for the old lady and Nancy to sojourn in harmony under the same rather incapacious roof. Tom was loyal to his mother, and Nancy was proud of him for that loyalty; so the lovers were just "waiting"—as many another couple since human love was born into the world have waited for a certain releasing eventuality which all conceive and expect, but which none ever mentions.

Gossip did not see why Nancy should wait for Tom until she dried up and blew away simply because a querulous old woman obtruded herself into the romance. Common Sense, on the thrifty other hand, admitted that Tom might well be worth waiting for, he being one of the steadiest, soberest fellows in the mountains, the owner of a sound, tight log house, a mule, a cow, and some several acres of good land located on a little arable bench between the forks of Elijah's Creek.

That winter it did not seem as if the

waiting must be for long. The mother was slowly sinking, eaten away by an incurable disease. As the affliction gained on her, her temper became more and more galling. With Nancy, on the other hand, so elusive and puzzling that he was well-nigh distracted at times, it was surely the winter of Tom's discontent.

But presently spring came creeping up over the ridges from the south, with soft, warm breath and dogwood blossoms and the song of bluebirds; and Nancy's heartbeats quickened and her color heightened; and one day Latimer rode around the corner of the garden fence on a Western pinto, having come by way of Byrdsville.

Packed before and behind him on the horse were a small, thin tent, a folding cot, and his clothing and bedclothing. Before nightfall he was installed in his tent on the slope above the garden, where he would be near the spring. Later an outfit of surveying tools was brought up from the express office at Byrdsville, and became the admiration of the Rawn and Messengill families, Lum Messengill being Aaron's son-in-law and neighbor, at about three miles distance.

Lum and Aaron had seen the government's geographical surveyors, who worked through the mountains several years before, but had never gained any clear comprehension of the nature of their business.

Latimer was not only a lover of adventure, but a born gambler. So strongly did the probability of a valuable find of minerals in the mountains appeal to him that he had given up a good position with a large engineering firm in New York, deciding to risk a year of his time and a few hundred dollars of his money in the search for the bonanza.

The possibilities that lay in the proximity of a very pretty and very unsophisticated girl also intrigued him.

At first he kept his kit of surveying tools well concealed from the commonalty, and proceeded to take long rambles for his health, accompanied by a small hammer, a magnifying glass, an aneroid barometer, and certain other paraphernalia, of the uses of which the Rawn family were profoundly ignorant.

At odd moments and in out-of-the-way corners he gave Nancy some deft little touches of courtship. He dared nothing of the sort while Aaron was about; the old man's somber, cogitant gaze at him held him in leash—it suggested unpleasant possibilities. Nancy, too, with keen intuition, divined that there was some other quest which had brought him back to the mountains, and she became shy and difficult.

Bill, the young scion of the house of Rawn, entered upon the most interesting period of his life with the return of Latimer. He was convinced that the valley man had come to the mountains on some mysterious mission, and he was consumed with curiosity to find out what that mission was. Day after day, whenever he could sneak away from the tasks set him by his elders, he prowled over hill and dale behind Latimer, who remained blissfully ignorant of the remorseless fate that dogged his footsteps.

Latimer discovered that some of his best opportunities for meeting Nancy alone occurred when she went to the woods after the cow, who did not always trouble herself to come home voluntarily. This chore often fell to Nancy because Bill was, as his mother very frankly remarked, singularly apt to be "out o' pocket"—that is, not to be found—when there was work to be done.

Late one afternoon Latimer caught up with the girl on a narrow woodland path and greeted her with a cheery hail and the question: "Going after old Red?"

"Yes, sir," murmured Nancy, flustered, as always, by the presence of the man of learning.

"Let's go up together."

Nancy could think of naught to say in denial, so they fared on, he talking chattily of his experiences, she listening with deep absorption. The man of the world, with an eloquence and fluency that might have been profitably employed in other lines, drew word pictures of the mighty civilization that lay beyond the mountains; a cosmos of which the little creature of the mists and the spruce forests, who had visited the county seat only twice in five years and had never sat in a schoolroom

in her life, was almost as ignorant as the grouse that whirled away from the trail in front of her.

She listened breathlessly, with wide blue eyes and parted lips, as he told of wondrous, high-piled cities, with vast hotels and palaces and towers, bejeweled with a million twinkling lights and rising tier upon tier until their pinnacles swam in the clouds—seven times as high above the earth as the tallest tree along the trail; of great railroad trains, hundreds of tons in weight, hurling themselves across the landscape at the rate of more than a mile a minute, like a great cosmic force in motion; of automobiles swarming in the city streets like ants about a nest; of the ocean and the colossal steamers that plow its waves, some of them as long as from Nancy's house to the upper corner of the cornfield, and carrying as many people at one trip as lived in all of Laurel County; of ships of the air that wheeled and swooped in the sky like yonder eagle that floated above the gorge of the Teloah.

To Nancy it was an epic. She listened, rapt and speechless, moving as one in a trance, almost unconscious of the immediate, external things about her. They found old Red, executed a flank movement and turned her homeward; and as they strolled behind her lagging footsteps still the tale went on. Presently they were approaching the clearing.

Latimer gently took the girl's hand and asked:

"Nancy, wouldn't you like to see all those things?"

"Oh, yes!" she sighed.

A long-dead chestnut had recently fallen beside the path, and its smooth, barkless log offered an inviting lovers' seat. He drew her toward it, and she sank down on it, placing one hand atop of the other on her knee, and looking down at them with her slow, wistful gaze.

For a moment the man sat silent, enjoying the contemplation of her simple beauty and purity. She was aware of his survey and a wave of color flooded her face.

"Nancy, child, you are very beautiful!" exclaimed Latimer as if involuntarily, well

knowing that thereby he would increase her embarrassment. His hand stole out and took hers again, but this time she withdrew it after a little struggle.

"Nancy, you know that I think a great deal of you, don't you?" he asked.

"No, I don't," she replied with simple abruptness.

He assumed an injured expression.

"Why, then," he asked, "should I come all the way back to the mountains to see you?"

"Mr. Latimer, what did you come back hyer fur?" she demanded suddenly, turning her blue eyes disconcertingly upon his. "I know in reason you didn't come back jest ter see me. They's somethin' else—miner'ls or timber or 'sech. You're out huntin' it ever' day. Oh, I know! I'm ign'rant, but I know a smart man like you wouldn't kem 'way back hyer inter the mountings jest ter see a gal."

His eyes wavered momentarily before her unexpected attack, but he rallied with his usual assurance. "Well, if I try to find something of value," said he earnestly, "it's only because I am not wealthy, and because I will need to earn a great deal of money in order to make the girl I love as happy as she deserves to be. It takes money—a lot of it—to live in the world out there that I've told you about."

"You town men is allus studyin' 'bout how ter make a gre't content o' money," charged Nancy, taking refuge in irrelevance.

It was sweet to think of being loved, really loved for the beauty of her soul and body, by this superman. The woman in Nancy desired it; but somewhere there was a tiny voice that kept whispering tormentingly that such a sincere love was improbable.

Latimer again possessed himself of one of her hands, small, but—as he noted, with one of the twinges she sometimes gave him—ruddy and roughened by hard work.

"Won't you try to like me a little?" he cajoled, looking into her eyes.

The man accounted himself rather a clever student of women—he had had successes in the past—and he guessed rightly that he would have to approach this simple

mountain girl very carefully, with plain, modest phrases, and without at first displaying too much ardor. He was assiduously endeavoring to follow the method dictated by his cold reason.

Her breath came rapidly. She knew that she ought to escape, yet sat trembling, flattered, breathless.

Suddenly they both became aware of a thin, gawky, shock-headed boy at a turn in the path only a few yards away, his normally capacious mouth widened by a vacuous grin. Bill was prowling, as usual.

The spell was broken. Nancy tore her hand from Latimer's, sprang to her feet, and with face aflame hurried past Bill toward the house, where old Red was already grumbling over the delay to her evening ceremony. As for Latimer, his first impulse was to slaughter Bill and throw his remains into the nearest ravine.

For many days thereafter the girl kept close about the house, and Latimer had little opportunity for a word with her. During the infrequent interviews that he was able to devise that summer he was often uneasily conscious of secret observation from the surrounding underbrush; for Bill still passed a goodly portion of his waking hours in stalking the mysterious stranger.

For a time that young sleuth-hound said little upon the subject to his sister, but the broad grin that marred his countenance when her eyes met his reminded her that she was in his power.

When Tom came over a day or two later—it must be admitted that his visits were less frequent of late, he being in an almost constant state of pique over the presence of Latimer and Nancy's evident interest in him—he found Nancy still bemused by the eloquent word-panorama of civilization which had been unrolled before her, and little inclined to talk of the more personal things that were nearer to his heart.

"Oh, Tom!" she exclaimed. "Hit must be a wonderful place wher' Mr. Latimer comes from!"

"Most probable hit is," admitted Tom dryly. "Some wonderful men comes f'm thar."

"I wisht ye could hear him talk 'boutn it, Tom. I never heerd Brother Dan'l Blount talk any purtier ner more elevatin'."

Tom sniffed.

"He told 'boutn them furrin countries and cities"—to the mountaineer anything outside the mountains is foreign; even Nashville is spoken of as being in "furrin parts"—"an' 'boutn the steam-kyars an' the ocean an' the ships, an' them vessels what rides in the air. Oh, Tom, it sounded like the Promised Land an'—an' the New Jerusalem!"

"All lies, like as not!" sneered Tom, forgetting how he had drunk in Latimer's dissertation on the war.

"Tom, they's boun' ter be things away off yander sech ez we hev never seed ner heerd tell of. These valley men what comes inter the mountings is a heap smarter'n what we air, an' hit stands ter reason they come from a smarter country."

"Yes," agreed Tom, "I take notice they's gin'ally most allus smart enough ter cheat honest folks outer the'r money an' land an' sech; an' fix it so the law can't tetch 'em, too."

"Hit don't help none ter be envious o' the man, Tom," lectured Nancy, "jest be-kase he's had a better chance 'n what you hev?"

"What man?" inquired Tom, with exaggerated innocence.

"Mr. Latimer."

"Thar it is!" raged the jealous lover. "I talk 'bout men in ginerall, an' hit don't mean nothin' ter you but 'Mr. Latimer.' You don't study 'bout nothin' else but Mr. Latimer."

"Nancy, the man hev bewitched ye! That thar critter hev got yer mind jest plumb cattawampus! Hit war an evil day when he kem traipsin' inter the mountings, with his lies an' his mealy-mouthed palaver!"

"Ther' hain't no man livin' ez kin bewitch me," declared Nancy, whose temper was also rising to the occasion. "I hev seen too many of 'em. I hain't studyin' 'bout Latimer ner no other man-person. But ef I was to marry a man," she continued, as an ingenious method of goading

Tom occurred to her, "hit would be a man with some eddication."

"What do sech as you want with a eddicated man?" demanded Tom. "You hain't got no larnin' yerself."

"A woman hain't no call ter hev book-larnin'," said Nancy sagely. "More partic'lar ef she hez a man that knows everything, an' has money ter spend, an' kin take her everywher' an' do fur her."

"Wall," said Tom in a cold fury, picking up his hat, "seein' ez you an' yer Latimer hev got it all settled, thar hain't no use o' me bidin' round hyar whar I hain't wanted."

"Suit yerself," consented Nancy, with a tiny twinge of dismay, but still stubborn. "I hain't a beggin' nobody ter set an' talk to me."

"Thar's a plenty o' gals in this hyar county," announced Tom, in a last desperate effort to triumph over his fair adversary, "ez will be mighty tickled ter hev me a waitin' on 'em; an' ef I should git so foolish ez to take a notion ter marry, I wouldn't hev to ax none of 'em twicet, neither."

"Thar may be a few sech addle-headed critters," conceded Nancy, "but I lay ye won't git none of 'em ter wait halfen a lifetime fur ye, like I hev."

Had the gentle Nancy been in her senses she could never have achieved a remark as cruel as that, either to friend or stranger; but in the heat of a bitter quarrel few people are entirely responsible for their words.

Nothing else that she could have said would have reacted so viciously on Tom as that gibe. The look that he bent upon her had the fury of a blow. With a strangled curse, he raised his old wool hat and struck it with all his force against the fence upon which he had been leaning.

The impotence of the gesture culminated his rage; and whirling upon his heel, he strode away without another word up the slope until he was lost to view among the trees.

As for Nancy, having watched him out of sight, she wandered blindly deep into the woods and threw herself down on the moss, where she sobbed and sobbed convulsively

until the shadows were long and the ravens flying homeward across the gorge signified that it was milking-time.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CLIFF LODGE.

ONE day Latimer was working his way along the edge of a little glen, examining the ledges that outcropped therefrom, when a sepulchral voice behind him announced: "Mister, I know jest what you're lookin' fur!"

Latimer was so startled that he whirled as if expecting an attack, his hand moving toward his hip pocket as he did so; then, conscious that such an action might be a grievous error, he quickly regained control of himself, dropped his hand, and smiled apologetically at the man who had addressed him.

That individual sat motionless upon a large rock, whence he had evidently been observing Latimer's movements for some time. He was a tall, very loosely constructed man of thirty, in lamentably tattered clothing and a hat whose brim flapped dispiritedly about his ears. His melancholy countenance was frowzed over with a week's growth of beard, and its joyless mien was accentuated by deep, blood-shot "haws" under the eyes; like those beneath the eyes of a bloodhound.

"I know jest what you're lookin' fur," he repeated, with no variance of expression.

"I'll bet you a cigar you don't," offered Latimer jovially.

"Yas," persisted the man in the same flat monotone, "hit's the copper."

For once Latimer was momentarily startled into staring silence. At length he ventured cautiously: "What do you know about copper?"

"I know whar it's at."

Latimer restrained his eagerness, and inquired as nonchalantly as he could:

"And what may your name be, friend?"

"Zek'l Gudger," responded the man dolefully. "My daddy knowed copper. He worked in the mines at Ducktown fur years. He found the copper on—a—not

fur from whar we set now, but he died before hit done him any good. An' when he was dyin', 'Zek'l,' he says ter me, 'you cain't do nothin' by yerself. Find a man with money,' he 'lowed, 'an' give him a sheer ter help ye.' Mister, I've been lookin' fur a man like you fur fower year."

"Well, I'll bite," said Latimer. "Where is the copper?"

The fortunate heir made no motion to rise from his seat on the rock. "I reckon hit 'll take 'bout fifty dollars ter p'int the way ter that copper," said he, "an' then I gits halfen what we make outer it."

Latimer swore under his breath; then, affecting a smile, he tried to beat down the price; but his efforts were vain against Zek'l's obduracy. It was finally agreed that Latimer should pay twenty-five dollars of the amount at once, and the balance when he had actually seen the ore. This having been thoroughly understood, Zek'l led the way out into the gorge of the Teloah and down to a point opposite Big Bluff Mountain. In fact, he paused on the very trail down which Latimer and Elton had approached the stream for the first time, seven months before. Here the mountaineer first looked up and down the trail to assure himself that they were alone; then, lifting a knobby forefinger, he pointed to a spot full three hundred feet up the face of the cliff from the water's edge.

"See that sorter greeny streak?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Wall, that thar hain't weeds ner grass ner ivy, ner it hain't moss."

"By George!" whispered the seeker. He gazed and gazed at that faint, far-distant streak with the intensity of a thirsty wanderer in the desert who sights a distant lake. Presently he withdrew his eyes reluctantly from the cliff, and glanced aside at the other with a shrewd look.

"But how do I know it's copper?" he asked, forestalling an expected demand for the balance of Zek'l's fee.

"We kin git up to it," replied the latter promptly.

"What, up the face of that cliff?"

Zek'l nodded calmly. "My daddy found the way an' showed hit ter me. Nobody

else hez ever been up thar. Hit's sorter skeery doin's fur a valley man, goin' up thar is—jest notches, an' toe-holds, an' crawlin' along on ledges an' sech. I mistrust ef you could do it."

"I can do it if you can," snapped Latimer. "Let's go up now."

But Zek'l demurred. "Everybody on the top side o' the world kin see you climbin' up the face o' that thar rock clift. I hain't never been up thar more'n fower or five times myself; I didn't wanter be seen. We better go up thar 'bout daylight in the mornin'."

They settled upon a trysting-place, and Latimer asked: "Now, when shall I meet you—about four o'clock?"

"I don't know nothin' 'boutn fower o'clock ner 'lev'm o'clock," replied Zek'l. "I'll be thar jest 'fore day."

Aided by a pocket flash-light, Latimer found his way down the trail to the creek next morning. The old red rooster crowed from a limb of the stunted hickory tree just outside the fence as he left Rawn's yard, and by the time he reached the appointed spot the light of the stars was paling and objects began to be dimly visible in dull-gray tones.

Zek'l sat, silent and somber, hunkered up against a rock. He had been at the meeting-place half an hour, and had grown panicky in the fear that Latimer had absconded to avoid the payment of the remaining twenty-five dollars.

With only a word or two, they began the ascent. For half a mile they climbed diagonally up a steep slope, working their way around toward the precipitous side of the mountain. Then they began to scramble over broken ledges and rock-strewn steeps.

Presently Zek'l stepped out on a little jutting shelf of stone, and pointed forward and upward, where the dark mass of the cliff cut a jagged but almost perpendicular line against the pale turquoise sky.

"Thar's the place we air aimin' fur. 'Tain't three hundred yards away, but a heap higher up than what we air. From now on hit 'll be sorter jub'ous climbin'."

Dubious indeed! It was just a matter

of inching upward, with every muscle in the body tensed and quivering; of cautiously grasping a finger-hold of rock or perhaps a slender bush, and then slowly, carefully bringing a knee or foot up to a higher position; of crawling on hands and knees around a shoulder of rock on a shelf only a few inches wide—while Death looked greedily upward from the chasm below. In spite of the chilliness of the early morning, Latimer was soon wet with perspiration; he dared not look downward nor anywhere save at the rock directly in front of him. But Zek'l, apparently unworried, talked almost incessantly, telling Latimer where to take hold and to place his feet, or relating incidents of his father's quest; only pausing now and then to grunt stertorously as he hoisted himself over a particularly precarious place.

Part way up the cliff suddenly receded, forming a deep, narrow notch, down which a tiny stream, a mere trickle, fell a sheer two hundred feet to a pile of broken stone beneath. The men approached the niche, crawling along a level shelf which widened there, forming a cozy grotto, screened in front by low laurel and winter huckleberry bushes.

"If a feller had plenty of rations," meditated Zek'l, glancing about the place appreciatively, "he could hide hyar a long time and nary a soul ever find him. Thar's yer beddin'-place, an' thar's yer good drinkin' water, an' them ivy bushes in front 'd hide ye from anybody on Wildcat Ridge or down in the gulf. Hit 'd git right tejous though, I reckon," he admitted in conclusion.

From there on the climb was similar to what had gone before, though more nerve-racking because of the greater height. The east had become a sheet of brilliant rose; the climbers could see faint touches of reflected ruddiness on the projections of rock in front of them. The foam-fretted surface of the stream was becoming visible among the dusky shadows of the gorge. An eagle darted from the cliff with a scream and circled about them angrily.

"Ef we was to git nigh that thar critter's nest," said Zek'l, "she might make one of us fall offen the bluff."

At length the adventurers crawled out upon a ledge which gradually widened to two or three feet, and Zek'l very cautiously stood upright.

"Hyar she is," he said without enthusiasm.

Sure enough, there was the ore—true copper, without a doubt; an irregular seam, exposed for a lateral distance of fully fifty feet, and widening to five feet in height in the middle, near the point where they stood. Latimer examined it closely, and chipped off bits and put them in his pocket; he passed his hands gloatingly over the great rough surface.

There lay his fortune, if he could but grasp it and make it his own. The very touch of the dull, corroded stone was magic—it opened up visions of the golden future. He saw himself, faultlessly groomed and care-free, sauntering down Broadway on a mellow autumn evening, just at the opening of the theatrical season; dropping into the big hotel which was his home; eating dainty, exotic foods from thin china and silver dishes; lounging on soft upholstery with millionaires at his clubs; dabbling a bit in stocks now and then just for the thrill of the hazard.

There were luxurious tiled bath-rooms with scented water; soft white linens and silks next one's skin; sensuous music; sparkling eyes; white shoulders gleaming through filmy stuffs; a massive motor-car; spring evenings in Italy; cherry-blossom time in Japan; India; some one to do everything for one; never to worry any more—

His dreams were harshly interrupted by Zek'l's raucous voice suggesting the payment of the balance of his fee. Although he felt a bit more affluent already, yet it was dangerous, Latimer pointed out, even to put a hand in one's pocket on that tenuous footing; but the shambling, ill-nurtured mountaineer looked rather positive and very capable as he stood at ease on his dizzy footing, and there was a certain glitter in his pale-blue eyes that was not to be ignored. A mere clock-shelf three hundred feet in air is no place for an argument, anyhow; so the money was handed over.

"An' the man that mines this hyar copper," added Zek'l, sternly, "has got to sheer with me—fair an' ekal—half an' half. Thar hain't a goin' ter be no ifs nor an's 'boutn that."

Again argument was unwise.

"Why, certainly!" smiled Latimer. "That's only right and proper. I promise it."

Mentally he laughed at the simple-minded yokel, and planned to toss him aside like an empty hull when the time of consummation came.

Then, as the morning was advancing and the danger of being seen increasing—though comparatively few people walked the trails along Wildcat Ridge and the Teloah—the two began the descent. To Latimer it was a nightmare. He did not lack nerve, but this was an unusual experience to him, and enough to worry a more experienced Alpinist than he. Climbing up a cliff is never as fearsome nor as dangerous, anyhow, as climbing down it. Latimer's sigh of relief when they finally stepped on to the earthen slope was so fervent that it was in effect a prayer.

Zek'l was engaged on the spot as assistant engineer and rodman; and for several days he and Latimer stole about through the brush with rod and transit, letting no one see them if it could be avoided. The mountaineer was fully as well aware of the importance of secrecy and as anxious to preserve it as was Latimer.

By triangulation the engineer ascertained the height of the ore above the river's bed; then he located similar levels on the mountainsides, near the cliffs. After some more study of the formations, he put away the surveying tools, and he and Zek'l fell to work with pick and shovel, drill and dynamite, to drive some precipitate entries in an endeavor to strike the precious lode.

They dug in with the pick as far as possible before using the dynamite; then used small blasts and smothered them with earth and timbers so that the sound might not carry far. Latimer was capable of a tremendous volume of work, both physical and mental, when under pressure. He grew leaner and his eyes glowed like dull coals.

Zek'l, too, toiled harder than he had ever toiled in his life, though he never became what might be called a speedy worker, his mountain birth being against that. "Slower than the seven-year itch," Latimer used to fume at him; and Zek'l stolidly endured such berating for the sake of the riches that were on their way.

CHAPTER V.

LATIMER MAKES PREPARATIONS.

MEANWHILE the plotter had begun working his will on Aaron Rawn. There was a curious web to be woven, and he spent many a nocturnal hour on his cot, looking out through the tent door at the stars, while his brain traced out the intricate pattern.

He began the process with Aaron by admitting that he had discovered a small vein of copper in Big Bluff Mountain; not a phenomenal find, but enough to be worth several thousand dollars if properly handled. If Rawn would follow instructions implicitly and keep his mouth shut, he would earn a great deal of money—perhaps even a thousand dollars. Old Aaron was interested but wary.

The conversation was being carried on in a low tone between the two men as they sat on the front step after supper. Their heads bobbed together, and Latimer emphasized his points with his forefinger on the ragged knee of the old man's trousers.

They fell silent as Nancy came straying around the corner of the house and lingered uncertainly in the gathering dusk, hoping from some casual remark from Latimer. He had not seemed to notice her so much of late—had been distraught and hard to understand. She couldn't see his face clearly in the gathering darkness, and he maintained a stiff silence, so she presently slunk around the house again, hurt and wondering. Latimer had refrained from speaking to her for fear she might stay and further interrupt a conversation that he was anxious to continue.

"He don't keer," Nancy was saying to herself, with a choke in her throat. "I

ain't no more than the dirt in his path. All he air studyin' 'bout is schemes, an' projickin' round how ter make money."

There was a moment's silence between the two men. The stridulant chorus of the tree-frogs rose higher, and the eery titter of a screech-owl came from a tree down the slope.

"How long have you lived here?" asked Latimer.

Without answering, the old man glared at him suspiciously.

"Oh, I don't mean you any harm, hang it! I'm on your side and you on mine. We'll have to work together in this thing, or we can't succeed. I'll lay all my cards on the table, and you do the same."

The mountaineer fingered his beard a moment, then answered:

"Jest a leetle over five year. Five year ago in March. I moved over hyar f'm Ca'l'ny. 'Tain't fur, ye know. The place whar I lived at over thar hed been bought by a big lumber company, an' they was cuttin' off the timber, an' spilin' the huntin', an' orderin' us around, an' me-an' my son-in-law, Lum Massengill, jest picked up an' left.

"My son Jim hed hed a sorter leetle rukus with one o' the lumber fellers, anyhow, an' we thought ez well leave the State. An' after we got over hyar, Jim got on-easy, him thinkin' they was comin' after him with a requisition paper, an' so he put out one night, an' I ain't seed him sence."

"You didn't build this house, did you?"

"No; a feller named Hodson built it."

"What became of him?"

"That I cain't tell ye. Hodson's wife died, an' him bein' sorter beset on account o' it, he broke up an' moved away to furrin parts; some says ter Texas. I heerd 'boutn this hyar place bein' empty, so I moved into it."

"You never saw Hodson, then?"

"No."

"This place didn't belong to him?"

"Law, no! Hit belongs to them heirs away off yander som'ers. Might' nigh the hull mounting belongs ter 'em, 'pears like."

Latimer *tchked* in disapproval. "That doesn't seem right."

"No, hit ain't!" growled the old man; and then he voiced an unwritten dogma of the mountains: "They hain't nobody got no right—leastways, not no Scriptur' right—ter own land away off from whar they live at, an' never see it nor 'tend it nor nothin'. Men what lives on the land, an' takes keer on it an' farms it, orter have some rights thar, but they hain't. Sech is ag'in' the law."

"You're correct," said Latimer in a lowered tone. "Absolutely correct; and I'm going to help you get what's coming to you."

He glanced over his shoulder at the women-folk, sitting by the feeble light of a candle, apparently doing nothing, but in reality listening eagerly to catch, if possible, a word now and then from the male oracles. Still in the same low voice, Latimer urged upon Rawn the necessity for absolute secrecy, for the present keeping the matter even from his family; and assuring him again that prosperity was awaiting him, he arose and retired to his tent to dream and plan.

The following weeks Latimer spent in flying visits to Knoxville, Chattanooga, and Nashville. In the two first-named cities he consulted two of the best "land lawyers" in the State; men with years of experience in untangling the snarled skeins of mountain land-titles.

To these attorneys he was presented as Mr. Frederick T. Smithers, of Cincinnati; and to them he set forth the suppositious case of a tract of land in Fentress County—possibly a hundred miles, as the crow flies, from Big Bluff Mountain. He learned much from these men of law about mountain lands and the ways of chancery courts. Thence he went to examine the old records of the land offices of early days.

Drifting unobtrusively back to Byrdsville, he took a room at the hotel and idled about the town for a few days, making himself agreeable in a quiet way to all and sundry who cared to make his acquaintance. The few who met him learned that he was a semi-invalid who was spending the summer in the mountains in the hope of warding off tuberculosis. He admitted that although his means were very limited,

he would not overlook a modest investment opportunity if one came his way.

Latimer made a very favorable impression upon all his new acquaintances, and heard much interesting gossip, both of the present and the past. He possessed uncanny dexterity in turning a conversation in any desired direction without the other party's being aware of the pilotage. Through the exercise of this faculty he picked up a great deal of valuable information from the townsfolk without appearing deeply interested.

He wandered into the hall of records in the garish little brick court-house one day, and remarked to the register of deeds, who sat motionless in a chair with his feet on a window-sill, gazing out at the distant blue bulk of Chilhowee Mountain, that he believed he'd look into certain land titles. Without rising, the functionary pointed out the required books and resumed his study of the landscape. Latimer was astounded to find the records so scanty; even in a mountain county, and he was further puzzled to discover that certain chains of title were only fragmentary.

"I wonder," said he aloud, "what is meant by this statement with reference to the Elnathan Stiles title: 'the records having been destroyed'?"

"That," explained the register, "means the court-house burnin' down."

"Court-house? Here?"

"Yes."

"When did that happen?" queried Latimer, with growing interest.

"Six years ago, the 10th of this month."

"Were all the records destroyed?"

"Yes. Lightnin' struck the buildin' at night."

"But I find here some instruments of dates previous to the fire."

"Yes. Some folks had the'r papers re-recorded when we opened the new books. Others didn't."

For ten minutes Latimer sat staring thoughtfully at the wall; then he closed the book he was examining, put it away carefully, and walked slowly and meditatively back to his room in the hotel, where he sat cogitating for an hour or more.

In a stroll about town one day he be-

came acquainted—by the merest chance, of course—with Oliver H. P. Henneberry, who was often spoken of as the county's leading attorney. Mr. Henneberry was a large person who was habitually clothed in a frock coat and a desire for office. In earlier stages of his career he had held such of the county offices as were most remunerative, and latter had served a term in the State Legislature; but being retired therefrom to private life by one of those political cataclysms which come to all statesmen, he was now looking hopefully toward the halls of Congress.

These continued lofty aspirations had resulted in Mr. Henneberry's language becoming a tissue of grandiloquence and eupheism. He never alluded to the county court-house as anything but a temple of justice, nor to the State as other than this grand and glorious old commonwealth. He seldom failed delicately to mention the presiding judge in a case as "this eminent and learned court," "profoundly versed in legal lore," and he invariably declared with emotion that the shock-headed, partly coatless, partly barefoot jury which he saw before him was the fairest, the most intellectual, and the highest-principled body of men that he had ever seen assembled in a courtroom.

Latimer bestowed some good cigars upon this legal giant, swapped stories with him, and became his agreeable gossip. Henneberry, like his fellow townsmen, yielded priceless information—such as was of no importance to his own interests—and in turn was promised the handling of Latimer's business matters, if any such developed.

"Strictly in confidence," hinted Latimer.

Mr. Henneberry, by an inclination of the head and a dismissing wave of the hand, indicated that the oral expression of the phrase had been superfluous.

"I expect to become an investor in your county, in a very small way, of course," continued Latimer. "An old fellow and his son-in-law up in the mountains where I have been staying own a considerable body of land which they are willing to part with at a price averaging a few cents per acre. It is miles and miles from any railroad, of

course, or even a decent wagon-road, and may therefore look like a doubtful investment; but the timber alone is worth much more than the price asked me, even if I must improve a road to bring it out."

"May I inquire, suh, ventured Mr. Henneberry courteously, "where the tract in question is located?"

"It is on and adjacent to Big Bluff Mountain."

Mr. Henneberry frowned thoughtfully and fondled his long black mustache, which was similar in design to the one worn by the late King Humbert of Italy. "I believe, suh, that that is on the upper waters of the Teloah, beyond the Ivy Fork?"

"It is."

"I was under the impression, suh," said the attorney, with a deprecatory cough, "that all the land in the immediate vicinity of that mountain was owned by the Munshaw estate, of New York."

Latimer's face expressed only innocent surprise.

"I have heard of an estate that owns some large tracts in that vicinity," he admitted, "but I feel sure they have no claim on the land that is offered me. The old man and the son-in-law have deeds to their land, and they have both been living in undisputed and notorious possession for seven years. Doesn't that constitute a title in Tennessee?"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

"Absolutely, suh! Absolutely! If you can prove those contentions beyond a peradventure, you are as firmly established in your claims as the Rock of Gibraltar upon its base, suh."

"Well, if I have any trouble about my title, Mr. Henneberry, I shall depend upon you to protect me," declared the unsophisticated purchaser. "Meanwhile I shall beg for absolute secrecy."

"Like that of the grave, suh. My clients nor my friends never have a complaint on that score, Mr. Latimer."

During one of these conferences a man and his wife came in to have a deed written. Opening a drawer in a sort of cupboard against the wall, the lawyer produced a blank form of warranty deed and sat down to draw the instrument.

Latimer meanwhile, with a delicate air of withdrawal from the vicinity of the conference, wandered over to the side of the room where the cupboard stood, and took a seat.

The ceremony over, Henneberry bowed his clients to the door and stepped through it into the hall for a final word or two of a more private nature. His back was turned, and he did not see Latimer's hand dart into the drawer, which had been left half open, and come out with two or three blank deed forms, which he quickly folded and thrust into an inner pocket.



INTERLUDE

BY KATHRYN WHITE RYAN

SOMETIMES a wave of memory comes
Engulfing me, and always unexpectedly—
The while I read or brush up crumbs,
Or gaze at snow, or braid my hair—
I stop. Softly I stare.

Oh, do you too, you at your great tasks,
Pause then as I, aware?
That instant do you dream as I,
Hear surge of rapture rolling by?



Nan Russell: Investigatrix

by Raymond Lester

WHEN you have finished reading this story you will be glad to remember that it is the first of a series of six dealing with the adventures of charming and daring *Nan Russell*—that there are five more coming, each of them just as interesting and entertaining as this one. Raymond Lester has done fine work for the *ALL-STORY WEEKLY* in the past, but to our mind these six stories are the best things that have come from his skilled pen.

I—BENEATH THE MAKE-UP

AN atmosphere of expectancy, of taut, baffled curiosity pervaded the dressing-room. By all the rules of habit and custom, the chorus should have been scurrying and hurrying over the removal of make-up and show dresses.

Yet, although the asbestos was down, and the theater was darkened, the girls lingered in front of their mirrors. To be exact, eight of them were in this condition of suspense and appeared totally forgetful of their various dates and the charm of midnight, frolicsome suppers.

The ninth girl was the only busy one in the row, and she, because she was exchanging her show dress for a well-cut, black gown sheathed with iridescent sequins, was the cause of the temporary paralysis of her companions.

"If that vamp frock came from Fifth Avenue, it cost her all of two hundred simoleons," whispered one dark-eyed beauty.

"And if she got it from Sixth, it didn't cost her a cent less than fifty bucks," added her nearest neighbor.

"Girls, you're way off," chirruped a third amiable critic cautiously. "S'pose she didn't buy it! How much did it cost her then?"

"You should worry," advised another. "You're all mad because Nan Russell's got you all guessing, but take my word for it, Nan ain't trading nothing but her own dollars for what she puts on her back."

Several indignant sniffs greeted this defense of the girl who was undergoing the whispered speculations, and the process of disrobing and removal of grease paint was resumed. As for Nan, she was too much of a woman to be unaware of the secretive attention that was being directed towards her, but she was also well capable of assuming an air of utter indifference to sidelong glances and gossip.

Five seasons in the chorus had taught Nan Russell all the tricks of the spangled profession and not a few of the queer idiosyncracies of the majority of her companion performers. She knew their general proneness to petty little jealousies; their ap-

petite for scandal, and their love for mischief making; and not caring whether she offended or pleased, she was well aware that nothing more annoys an inquisitive mind than a baffling mystery.

For over a week she had smiled and evaded all oblique and direct inquiries regarding her purpose in leaving the theater after the evening performance attired in gorgeous raiment, and now, because she had kept them all guessing, the girls held aloof and refrained from doing Nan the customary honor of borrowing her rouge and sticks of make-up.

"Let's get out before she does," whispered one of the girls. "Maybe we can hang around a bit and see what kind of a feller she's got in tow. Must be a lord-duke or one of them feed barons. I ain't never seen one of them fish. Must be some kind of a piker, I'll bet."

A flurry of sudden haste followed this practical suggestion, and when Nan Russell came out of the stage door, she found half a dozen of the chorus bunched on the sidewalk.

"Rather cold to be standing around, isn't it?" asked Nan, and without waiting for a reply, she added: "Night, girls," and walked to the curbstone.

Peering, sidelong glances followed her as she stepped into an empty taxi, and the sighs of disappointment mingled with remarks of an acid nature.

"She didn't even tell the shover where to drive to," snapped one of the watching girls viciously. "You can't beat that for artfulness."

Enterprising nosyness had been balked again, but the smile of triumph that Nan had permitted herself as she had passed the group of girls, vanished as soon as she sank back in her seat. The curve of her upturned, top lip straightened, and a look of brooding anxiety came into her eyes.

"They think I'm having a gay old time," she murmured in back-stage slang. "I wonder how many of them would have the nerve to tackle the job I'm on and—see it through?"

There was no one to answer Nan's questions; but it is safe to say, that had the others known whither she was bound, there

would have been no eagerness to take her position or carry out her tasks.

A stolen joy ride, a visit to some veneered roadside inn, is about the sufficient limit of the average white-light heroine's pluck in adventure. Nan's destination was one that would hold out no temptations for timid visitors. She was going to a place where, under the mask of smug respectability; crooks, grafters, criminals and fools foregathered to gratify a common passion.

Nan Russell was bound for Dan Kern's. The chauffeur that was driving Nan had needed no instructions, for he was paid to wait each night for Nan and—keep his mouth shut.

II.

THE taxi came to a stop in front of the broad stoop of a brownstone mansion. Nan descended, and before she had reached the heavy, iron-grilled front door, the car was well out of sight.

"Come, but don't linger on your arrival," was one of Dan Kern's working mottoes, and all who came to that house were meticulously careful to obey Kern's strict injunctions. Consequently, although a score or more of people came to see Dan Kern every evening, including Sundays, there was no undue attention drawn to the number of his visitors. To make his desire for unobtrusiveness safe from betrayal, Dan Kern rented the two adjoining houses and his guests made entry to his presence by any one of the three front doors.

At the side of the door facing Nan was a brightly polished bell-push; it was but another small precaution of Dan Kern's and Nan applied the tip of her finger, not to the obvious spot, but to the top right hand screw that held the bell plate.

Had she pushed the bell, the door would have remained closed. The screw yielded a fraction of an inch to her pressure and—the door opened.

A sombrely clad footman bowed the girl into the dimly lighted, spacious hall. Wooden faced and stiff gestured, he gently closed the door. Then, secure from the remote possibility of all observance from the street, his pose changed.

He turned quickly. The stony expres-

sionlessness of his features merged into a look of crafty impudence. He leered at the girl and whispered huskily: "The boss wants t' see you before you go in. Said you was t' go imejit to his office."

Nan flushed and stepped back as the footman bent nearer. She resented the familiarity of the man's smirking grin, but was powerless to make her distaste felt.

"Very well," she said briefly and walked quickly across the thickly carpeted hall.

"Come," grunted a voice when she tapped at the portière-shrouded door, and Nan entered the room that Dan Kern named his "office."

The rich furnishings of the place were vastly different from the plain fittings and fixtures usually associated with business, but they accorded with Kern's way of making an income of over a hundred thousand dollars a year. It was part of his policy to impress all who came to his house with his prodigal luxury and wealth; but as Dan Kern's choice was governed only by the high cost of an article, it is not surprising that his good taste was an object of joking comment among some of his guests.

Nobody, however, had any fault to find with Kern's reserve stock of wines and his excellent cigars. In the selection of these two items, Dan scored and—he profited.

Lolling at his ease in an armchair, Kern looked up as Nan Russell stood before him. His small, keen eyes surveyed her refined beauty with ironic appraisal. The fingers of his thin left hand toyed with a huge diamond that blazed in the center of his expanse of frilled shirt front. In his right hand Dan held a fat cigar bearing a gilt band that advertised its cost and quality.

Dan Kern had faith in his belief that he dressed the part of a gentleman, and he quite easily mistook a nonchalant rudeness of manner for a replica of suave aloofness that he had copied from some of the gilded fools who left their money in his care.

"You're ten minutes late, Nan," he commenced. "You know when I took you on at ten bucks per night, and all refreshments free gratis for nothing, I gave you pretty much of a cinch. You gotter play up to the bargain, and be here at eleven thirty sharp. Get me?"

"Is that all you wanted to see me about?"

"No, it ain't."

Dan sat up, and quick anger robbed him of all care in his choice of words. He reverted to his natural form of expression.

"You gotter can that highfalutin' manner with me," he snapped. "I'm boss here an' what I says goes. Get me? Well, you do as I tell you an' there won't be no fallin' out."

"I told you last night to get that calf-head Langton Whitely next the bubbly stuff, didn't I? Wait now. Don't butt in before I've had my say-so. I saw you steer him clear of the buffet more 'n once. He left here more 'n half sober, and with close on five thou of *my* money in his kicks."

"I don't run this show f'r fun, or to let a lotter boobs soak me. I'm in the game to make a pile quick. See? Get me? An' let me put you wise t' this: it ain't no good stickin' up your chin and thinkin' you can quit because I want things done my way an' not yours."

"Any guy—or skirt—that's working f'r me in this joint *can't* quit till I go bust, or give the word. I ain't givin' you or nobody else the chance t' sell me out. We're in this together. How about it?"

"I'm sorry," said the girl with downcast eyes. "I thought if Whitely drank too much, he wouldn't be able to play. It was hardly my fault if you lost. He couldn't cheat—"

"No *he* could not," interrupted Kern with an evil smile creasing his sallow features. "You're right there, but how about me or one of the other boys *if* Whitely had been soused enough?"

"Gee, but you're some simp. A little bit of it goes all right in the sa—lon. Gives tone and puts the dubs off their guard. But for th' love of Mike lead them to the buffet. Twelve bucks a quart I paid for that stuff, but if that guy, Whitely, soaks up enough of it, I'll see some int'rest on my money. Now—"

Dan Kern's frown vanished. It was not good business to allow the girl to leave him with that downcast expression on her face. The salon was no place for glumness.

"I've had my say," he went on with

watchful geniality; "and there's an extra ten spot on the nail f'r you before you leave in the morning, if you help make a killin'. Have a drink before you go?"

"I'd rather—"

"Aw, shucks," cut in Kern, reaching for the decanter that stood before him. "Just to show there's no ill feelin'," he urged as he filled two liquor glasses. "Ah, that's better. You're a good sport all-righty. I shouldn't wonder if you'll draw down a hundred a week when you know the ropes a bit better."

"I hope I shall," said Nan and met Kern's foxy, searching gaze with a smile of arch surrender to his orders. Then, nodding brightly, she backed out of the room.

Flushed and trembling with the reaction of her submission to Dan Kern's covert threats and open bullying, the girl stood for a moment to recover her poise. Shielded by the folds of the portière from observation of the footman who stood at the far end of the hall, she waited the return of her normal coolness. The strain upon her self-control had been a severe test of her capacity for dissimulation; but when a few seconds later the guardian of the front door saw her enter the salon there was no betraying sign on her face of the trial she had been through.

III.

DAN KERN's salon, likewise Dan himself, require a few explanatory words. A brief description of the former will suffice to remove all doubts respecting Dan's profession. The only difference between the room and the man being the fact that not always had the vast and lofty drawing-room been a salon, or more properly and plainly speaking, a swell gambling hell. Whereas Dan Kern—well, he had been born to crookedness, and his cunning-cupidity had developed with his increasing prosperity.

From the days when Dan had touted on race courses and haunted pool-rooms for small change, he had always found pigeons to pluck. Having learned that any man tainted with the gambling instinct is not far removed from idiocy, Dan set himself to gather the shekels from those who had the most to throw away. It had taken

him ten years of chicanery to amass enough capital and the rental and equipment of the three houses cost him twenty thousand dollars.

A big sum to invest in a gambling den, but rich in returns. Dan Kern calculated to retire a millionaire, and did not begrudge payment of the bills for the wine and cigars that he had so lavishly placed at his guests' disposal.

Neither did he regret the three thousand dollars he had paid for the elaborately carved and inlaid roulette table that stood in the center of the salon. Every Sunday night, when Dan sat in his office and made up his profit and loss account, he metaphorically cut himself a slice of melon, and he relied upon Nan to help him secure all the change he could conjure out of his most likely client.

Old Robert Whitely was a multi-millionaire; therefore, since his son Langton was bitten by the gambling bug, it was obvious that the boy was worth going after to the limit. If fair means did not succeed, then there were several neat and well-tested tricks that would place Langton with his back to the wall.

Nothing violent did Dan contemplate. No. Finesse was his trump card.

Play was in full swing when Nan entered, and excepting for a brief glance from some of the men who stood watching the ivory ball skipping and clicking on the revolving ebony disk, nobody took any notice of her. The girl's presence was only required to bridge over a dull moment and cozen a loser to further losses.

"Get 'em plunging and keep 'em goin'," had been Kern's instructions: "Laugh at 'em. Kid 'em, or comfort 'em, but steer 'em to the table. Hand out the smiles and the soft chatter."

Thus had been the terms of Nan's engagement by the gambler, and from eleven thirty until three or four in the morning she was pledged to appear happy and gay for—ten dollars a session.

Sitting on a velvet divan, the girl alternately watched the door and the mob silently gathered around the roulette table. One by one, newcomers drifted in. Some of them she recognized as hardened cynics,

disciples of the goddess of chance, and followers of any profitable evil.

Crook肘ed honest spendthrift. Crafty-eyed men placed their money on the same squares and numbers as open-faced youngsters and elaborately gowned, *déclassé* women. The gambling instinct brought them all to the same ignoble level, and although Nan's lips were smiling, her eyes held a shadow of seriousness.

Midnight came and with the passing of the next half an hour the hope grew in Nan's thoughts that the young man Dan Kern was set upon victimizing would not appear. She shrank from an undertaking that would prove profitable and advantageous to herself; but before one o'clock, she knew she would have to play her part and be prepared for all emergencies.

Smiling with boyish frankness, Langton Whitely came toward her immediately the door closed behind him. Ignoring all invitations to try his luck, he took a seat beside the girl and launched into a bantering line of talk.

Over the young man's shoulder Nan caught an occasional glimpse of Kern's scowling face, and although she knew the peril of thwarting the gamester's design, she ignored the signaling glance of his eyes, and refrained from urging Langton to drink or play. She did more, for when the young man announced his intention of skinning Dan Kern of another wad of coin, she whispered:

"Why don't you quit while you're on the right side? You know what Kern is. And for Heaven's sake don't stare at me like that. He mustn't guess that I am warning you. Be good now and leave this horrible place while you have the chance."

Langton mustered a grin to cover his astonishment.

"I thought you—" he commenced, then stopped embarrassed.

"You were about to say that I am going against my job in trying to prevent you from making a fool of yourself," murmured the girl. "Well, I'm *supposed* to help you along the slippery path, and lead you to a fall, but somehow— Careful! Here comes the waiter. Order something."

"Say," whispered the young man after

the waiter had gone. "It's mighty decent of you to give me the tip." Then he went on, squaring his shoulders with the vain-gloriousness of youth. "I guess, though, I can take care of myself and—Dan Kern."

Nan Russell shrugged her shoulders with an air of indifference that was part real, and part assumed. She sighed, and wondered no longer that old Robert Whitely was unable to control his wayward, pig-headed son.

The boy was of age and in command of a fortune inherited from his mother. Through blundering abandon to the passing dictates of the moment Langton was likely to land himself into as bad a mess of trouble as if he had been cursed with a vicious, instead of a careless temperament, and from what the girl knew of Dan Kern, there was only one person in that house who could stand between Langton Whitely and some subtle form of scandal and disgrace.

Among the crowd of men close-pressed about the roulette table were wolves in sheep's clothing. There, masquerading in dress clothes, were an even half a dozen stick-at-nothing gunmen and thugs.

In a moment of rage or desperate need, a nod from Dan Kern would change the placid quiet of the salon to grim threat of violence. Those henchmen were as willing to play with life and death as they were eager to wager their last dollar on the caprice of the ivory ball.

If Langton lost the money he had won the night previous, all might be well. If he went further and enriched Dan Kern with a bit over, then there would be no danger of him being molested. Not yet.

"Sooner or later, Dan Kern will get him, though," reflected Nan. "And then—"

By three o'clock, her worst forebodings showed signs of fulfilment. The silent group about the gaming table were watching Langton Whitely's play with envious greedy eyes. In the background near the buffet lurked Dan Kern. His smiling assumption of indifference was but a cloak for black rage.

Langton was winning. The pile of banknotes in front of him testified to his extraordinary run of luck. He had not counted what he had won, but Dan Kern knew, and a project that had long been in his mind

ripened to deadly determination. He had no intention of allowing the young man to get away with a further haul of twelve thousand dollars. He advanced smiling to the table.

"Time for a break, ladies and gentlemen," he called. "While our fortunate young friend is counting his winnings, we'll drink his health. Join me, Whitely?"

"Just a minute," replied the other with a gay laugh. "I believe you've broken my run of luck. Never mind, I guess I've had enough for one night. You're a pretty good sport, Kern."

Gathering up the bank-notes by handfuls, Langton carried them over to Nan.

"You're my mascot," he said as he bent over her. "Count them for me and keep a couple of the big fellows for yourself. What? No, don't be scared, I'm just going to have one more drink, then I'm off home."

Langton's one drink multiplied by six, and before he returned to claim his money, Dan Kern came over to the girl's side.

"You'll leave the room with him," he muttered, "and take him to my office. I've got him fixed. Take his arm when he comes along, he'll need it."

For one fleeting second Nan's eyes dwelt on the telephone, then the thought of those six gunmen drove all hope of gaining a bloodless victory out of her mind. Her's was a waiting game, and so it must continue to be.

White-faced, but mistress of herself, she waited and when Langton came unsteadily toward her she rose, stuffed the notes into his coat pocket and linked her arm in his. To that point she had carried out Kern's orders. Then she introduced a variation of her own.

"When Kern gets out of here," she urged, "make for the street door on the jump. Kern—What's the matter with you?"

Langton gazed down at the girl with uncertain, shifting eyes. "I feel rot—rotten," he mumbled. "As if—as if—"

"Good fortune has upset his brains a bit," said a quiet voice, and Nan's heart quailed as Dan Kern assisted in leading the swaying young man to the door.

Arrived in the hall, Kern dragged the half

conscious man into the office and pushed his sagging body into a chair.

"You've given him something. You've do—"

"Doped him? Sure I have," sneered the gamester. "What d'you think? Did you reckon I was going to let him clean me out of more 'n twenty thou? He'll come round in a few minutes, and after I've bluffed him with these—he can go."

Dan Kern took a sheaf of papers from his pocket.

"I.O.U.'s," he chuckled. "All c'rectly signed, Langton Whitely. The boys 'll swear we had an all-night game in this room. We'll keep him here until morning and get his check for twice what he thinks he's got out of me.

"If he denies his signature I'll make his name stink in every club-room. The old man 'll pay, if he won't. The old dub's crazy about his whelp, and he'd hand out a quarter of a million rather than have it known that his precious boy frequented a gamblin' joint."

Grimacing with satanic joy, Dan Kern dropped the promissory notes on the table.

"Get that twelve thousand bucks outer his pocket," he ordered. "Meanwhile, I'll have a man-sized drink to myself."

Secure in his control of the situation, Kern turned his back to the girl. He reached for the decanter, but his hand stopped rigid in mid air. He felt the touch of chill metal on the nape of his neck. A shiver of fear trickled up and down his spine.

"Don't move a finger!" hissed a voice.

"You—you—" gasped the gamester.

"Yes—Nan," retorted the girl sharply. "And make no mistake; this is a real gun I've got on you. Move the fraction of an inch and—"

During the pause that followed Dan Kern stood staring straight ahead of him. Bravery was not his forte, and even when he saw a slim white hand reach for the water pitcher that stood on the table, he scarce dared to blink an eyelid.

The muzzle of an automatic, as applied by Nan's prompt and unexpected deftness, is a wonderful preserver of peace and silence.

Presently Dan heard the swish of the water as the girl dashed the full contents of the jug in Langton's face. Followed a gasp and a grunt, and a dazed, bewildered young man awoke to some realization of what he had escaped from. His gratitude overflowed in a torrent of wondering words, but Nan cut short his thanks.

"Bind and gag him," she urged. "There's not a moment to lose. Now," she added when Kern lay securely bound in a corner of the room, "are you fit to tackle another?"

Langton stared in amaze at the cool decisiveness of the girl. He nodded dumbly and Nan flung open the door.

"Mr. Kern wants you," she called and the footman came, all unsuspecting of his welcome. He found a resting place in Langton's arms, and he too was trussed up and laid beside his master. This duty performed, Nan took up the telephone and murmured one word.

"Kern," was all she said, and the exchange operator repeated the word to the men who had been waiting for three nights in readiness for that signal.

"The police will raid this place in less than sixty seconds," said Nan as she hung up the receiver. "It's time we went. Especially you, for I promised that I would get you clear of *all* trouble if possible."

"Who—what are you?" asked Langton Whitely as they sped down the brownstone stoop.

Nan smiled enigmatically as she hurried away.

"Ask dad," she said. "*He* knows. Now show your gratitude by going home as fast as you can."

The following morning Nan Russell visited an office. A real office this time, and the name on the door was plain for all men to read. The square-shouldered, bluff old gentleman who rose to greet her was the chief of a detective agency of international repute. He beamed at her and lauded to the skies her pluck and prowess.

"We could never have got away with it with one of our regular operatives," he observed. "The mere fact that Kern knew you as a genuine chorus girl was enough to

lull all his suspicions. All the same, you did splendidly."

"Old man Whitely is crazy to see you. He phoned me this morning and told me you were to have whatever you asked in reward for saving his son. The youngster's had his lesson and he's sworn off gambling for good. As for myself, I can only express my appreciation of your cleverness by offering you a staff position."

That evening there was much conjecture and wise nodding of heads in the dressing-room. Eight clever chorus girls were firmly convinced that Nan Russell had gone far from the straight and narrow path.

"Anyway, she was too mighty uppish," declared the dark-eyed beauty. "We should worry."

Neither did Nan, for she was well launched on her new career. Before nightfall a check for five thousand dollars was handed to her by Robert Whitely, and her contract with the chief detective was signed and sealed.

Langton Whitely's interest in midnight sports was superseded by a more absorbing ambition. He devoted himself to convincing Nan that the detective profession was too tame a pursuit for a girl of her spirit.

Whitely senior gave his blessing to the success of his son's venture.

"Hope you get her," he said. "She has good looks, and brains. These, plus the money you'll have, ought to keep you from making a fool of yourself again."

"Take my advice, grab her first chance you get. Elope with her. Anyway, marry her within a month. If you do not, darned if I won't have a shot at it myself. She's one in a million, and plucky enough to tackle an old bear like me. If I were ten years younger, a cub like you wouldn't have a chance."

Confident words these, but although the young man made the most of his opportunities, the month passed and Nan Russell persistently refused to change her name or her profession.

"I have heard," she remarked with a disarming smile, "that some wives work even harder than chorus girls, and have to exercise greater ingenuity than a detective, so, for the present, I'll remain—Nan Russell."

The Unlatched Door

by Lee Thayer

Author of "The Mystery of the Thirteenth Floor," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

ONE spring day in Central Park, Richard Van Loo Schuyler, a wealthy young New Yorker, was attracted by a pretty girl—until he remembered that she was employed as a maid in the house next his own. Then he saw a good-looking young man seemingly annoying her, and when this young man attempted to follow her prevented him from doing so. After the girl had disappeared the young man good-humoredly offered his hand, which Dick grasped.

That night, after a rather wild evening in a restaurant, Dick entered the house next to his own—a fact which he discovered after he had removed his wet shoes. He struck a match, and on the hall floor saw a beautiful woman in evening dress—dead; and a pool of blood on the floor. Arguing that he could do nothing to help, he quietly left the house, entered his own and went to bed.

Next morning, as he was leaving his house, the girl of the park called to him that there had been murder done, that there were only women in the house, and that she did not know what to do. Pretending astonishment, Dick allowed her to show him the body of her mistress, Mrs. Rutledge, lying as he had seen it the night before. The dead woman's husband was at their country house, and Dick tried in vain to reach him by telephone. So Dick called a doctor, and the police.

The girl, who said that her name was Nora Brady, seemed superior to her station, and when she asked Dick to keep a small packet for her, saying that her entire future depended on it being safe, he consented.

An examination was conducted by Police Captain O'Malley, who arrived accompanied by Detective Peter Clancy, an old acquaintance of Dick's. Nora, who now spoke with a trace of brogue, said that the previous evening she had helped Mrs. Rutledge to dress, taking the place of a French maid, who had been discharged; that Mrs. Rutledge had dined at home with Cuthbert Pendleton, a friend of the family, and that they had gone out together. Nora had not heard them return. Miss MacLeod, the old Scotch housekeeper, said that all the servants except Nora had presented unquestionable references, but that Nora had been engaged by Mrs. Rutledge herself, who seemed to know her. The only other servant in the house was Sarah Connors, whom O'Malley recognized as an ex-shoplifter. She had been alone in the basement, and could have admitted any one to the house.

Through Clancy's influence the coroner dismissed Dick, after asking him a few questions. Then in the hall O'Malley and Clancy found a paper of matches that Dick had dropped, and the damp insole of a shoe.

CHAPTER VIII.

A PAIR OF PUMPS.

THE blood beat heavily in Richard Schuyler's ears as he let himself out at the basement door. No circumstance of his easy, sheltered life had prepared him in the remotest degree for an experience such as he had just undergone.

His nerves had been jumping in a most

disconcerting and unaccustomed way ever since he had first followed O'Malley into the hall, lured by a fatal fascination and a desire to see if the matches he had lost the night before had been dropped inside the house. He had no reason to fear that the police would be able to connect so non-committal a thing with himself, but he hoped that he had not left even that faint clue to link him with the crime.

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for March 6.

O'Malley had gone outside at once and closed the heavy vestibule door, leaving the hall in temporary darkness. Then he had come back and turned on the electric light, the switch being just inside and to the left of the door.

As the light flashed up, Dick's eyes darted swiftly around the floor. O'Malley's back was still turned when Dick caught sight of the insole, lying now almost in plain sight just under the edge of the settle. Previously it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish it in the dim light filtering in from the deep vestibule and through the glass panels of the door, leaving the side of the wide hall almost in darkness. It was black and lay on a black square of the tessellated floor, but it was in a position that made its discovery inevitable.

With one long stride Dick advanced and covered it with his foot. It was an instinctive movement. What he should do with it he did not know. The frightful circumstances in which he was enmeshed, the horror of the hideous dreams of the night before, which still held him in thrall, and all the complications possible and impossible which flashed through his mind, made it imperative that he should do something.

He was absolutely certain from the position of the insole that it had fallen from one of his pumps when he kicked them off, loosened, in all probability, by the water into which he had stepped. It could never exactly fit any shoe in the world but his own. There were bound to be faint impressions of nail-heads in the heel and slight hollows made by the ball of his foot and the toes, for the shoes were not new. They had, in fact, been very comfortable and he had worn them longer than was his custom.

These thoughts darted through his mind as he stood there. His position, just at the head of the dead woman, was a natural one for an interested bystander, but he could not maintain it indefinitely.

If he could manage somehow to pick up the tell-tale bit of evidence and get it into his pocket unperceived, he would be safe. He now wished with all his heart that he had told the whole story of his midnight adventure to the police at once, but the

package that had been intrusted to his care had made him hesitate, until now it was too late.

There was no one in the hall but the police captain—and the dead woman with the strange, mocking smile on her scarlet lips. Richard felt more afraid of her than of the man. What strange, fateful story would those lips tell if they could speak? How would they explain their expression of a Mona Lisa and reconcile the pool of darkened crimson with the quiet of the peacefully folded hands?

Under an almost hypnotic spell he watched his chance, and the first time O'Malley fully turned his back, with every sense alert, Dick stooped swiftly toward the floor—and caught sight of Peter Clancy just emerging from the door at the end of the hall.

There was no time to complete the movement. Peter's eyes were full upon him. There was nothing to do but wait.

Not long afterward Peter had suggested his going into the drawing-room, making it clear by his manner that Dick's presence there was undesirable. O'Malley was continuing his search at that end of the hall and there was no probability that there would be another chance to recover this little bit of worthless leather for which, at that moment, he would gladly have bartered half his fortune.

With a sliding motion of his foot as he advanced toward the drawing-room, he managed to kick the offending insole out of sight under the settle. It would certainly be found there, but he might be able to leave the house before its discovery and he somehow felt that, once outside, the unreasoning fear that gripped him might be broken.

And now it held him tighter than before. Had his face betrayed him when the newly-found clue had been so suddenly presented? Probably not; and yet he could not get rid of the idea that some enigmatic fate was at work weaving the thread of his life in and out among the meshes of this tangled skein.

He had but one idea now, and that was to disconnect himself forever from the pair of shoes that had tripped him into this

equivocal position. He looked at his watch. There was still time and to spare before the train left which would carry him out from these maddening lines of stony-faced houses and into the green and quiet of the country. How he longed for the wide, free swing of trained muscles and the breath of the clean world in his nostrils.

He let himself quietly into his own house and ran up the stairs.

"Why, Richard," said a slow, gentle voice as, panting, he reached the upper hall. "They told me you'd gone out of town, my dear. What brings you back so soon?"

A darling little old lady stood at the head of the stairs, leaning on the arm of a middle-aged colored woman. They presented a striking picture as they stood there, the light from an open door falling athwart the two figures.

Little Miss Van Loo was plump and fair. Her face, though very old, was soft and smooth and tinged with an almost girlish flush. Her abundant white hair was smoothly parted and carefully aranged under a tiny cap of old lace and lavender ribbons. The same creamy lace was folded about her throat over a dress of silver gray that whispered softly when she moved.

The servant, on whose arm she leaned, was dressed in black, relieved by bands of white at neck and wrists. Her strong, dark face suggested a touch of Indian ancestry and her graying hair bore witness to years of faithful service.

She had been in the family for nearly half a century and old Miss Van Loo was rarely to be seen without her. In fact, she had been accused by laughing friends of taking Susan about with her as a foil to set her off; for the same reason that one puts an ebony panel behind a priceless bit of old china.

"You look troubled," the old lady continued. "Has anything happened amiss?"

"Everything is all right, aunty darling," said Dick, removing his hat and stooping to kiss her. "I was detained and had to come back for something. I want to catch the eleven o'clock train if I can and I'll have to hurry a bit, but if there's anything I can do for you before I go—"

"Nothing, my dear. Run along now and

have a good time. Susan will take me out for an airing a little later. Good-by."

The little old lady with her dark companion went slowly on down the stairs and Dick raced up to the next floor. His rooms had been put in perfect order for the day and there were no servants about.

He threw his hat and bag upon a couch and hastily pulled open a door of the closet where his boots were kept. They were neatly arranged in a cleverly devised rack through which he sought in a feverish hurry. He had never realized before how many shoes he had. They seemed innumerable. The light in the closet was not good and he was so intent on finding one particular pair that he spent several moments of irritation before he remembered to switch on the electric bulb in the ceiling.

The shoes seemed to jump at him out of the dimness and he went over them pair by pair, at first confidently and then with growing uneasiness. The ones he sought were not there.

He switched off the light and closing the door, stood for a puzzled moment in the middle of the room. What should he do now? Jenkins, of course, would know what had become of them, but how to account to that faithful servitor for his sudden re-appearance and the demand for this one special pair of pumps?

His throat was hot and parched with excitement.

"I'm taking this thing too seriously," he said to himself, striving to shake off his anxiety. "After all, there ought to be no danger. I must pull myself together."

He moved over to the bath-room for a drink of water, of which he stood in great need. He opened the bath-room door—and there, carefully fitted on their own particular trees and set up to dry before an open window, stood the long-sought pumps.

CHAPTER IX.

A LOSING GAME.

A FEW moments later, Richard Schuyler, looking from his window, saw a cab drive up and stop in front of his door. He had ordered it by telephone

from his own room and breathed a sigh of relief that it would not again be necessary for him to pass on foot that fatal house next door.

He put his bag into the cab himself, ignoring the driver's proffered services. He was keyed to such a pitch of nervous strain that he felt that he could not let anyone else touch it for, after considering every possible hiding place in his rooms, he had decided that the package Nora had placed in his keeping would be safer if it was in his immediate possession, under his own watchful eye.

The servants in his house were old and trusted and had access to practically every drawer and cupboard. He had never before in all his life had anything to conceal and Jenkins had keys to all his bureaus and chiffoniers.

He carried the incriminating pumps wrapped in an unmarked paper—he had been careful about that—under his arm. In the disordered state of his mind it seemed to him that he could not get rid of them too quickly, and he had a confused idea of throwing them from the cab, somewhere on the way to the station.

He was still studying his plan as the cab started but he was not so much engrossed as to pass Number 20 without an anxious glance.

It had already assumed the look of a house of mourning and a group of eager young men with note books conferring with an officer at the basement door showed that the murder literally was out.

Dick leaned as far back as possible in the shadow and the cab rolled eastward. It turned down Park Avenue and Dick looked out wearily. There were people passing up and down the street as usual, but some blocks farther down looked almost deserted and he thought this might be the place to put his hastily conceived plan into execution.

He had placed the package of pumps on the floor of the cab when he got in. It now lay close against the left hand door, directly behind the driver. The cab continued its swift, smooth flight and Dick looked ahead, scanning carefully both sides of the street.

In a moment they reached the empty block on which he had placed his hopes. Dick waited until they were near the center. Then he pushed his toe well under the package and cautiously turned the handle of the door.

He glanced quickly about. Not a soul in sight. He opened the door quietly and was about to kick the offending pumps over the running board into the street, when he saw a small boy dart out from one of the houses, following a ball which rolled into the middle of the street, almost to the exact spot which Dick had destined his shoes to occupy.

The obvious impossibility of his plan suddenly flashed across Dick and he leaned back in the cab and spoke sincerely:

"You utter ass! You double-distilled damn fool!"

A mist seemed to melt away from in front of his eyes and he was able to see the events of the last few hours with some degree of clarity.

"You! Born and bred in New York, to think you might be able to lose a big package like that," he gave it a vicious kick "in the street and in broad daylight. There would always be some bright-eyed boy to spring out of the pavement and pick it up. What an idiot you are!"

He had a habit, contracted through years of lonely childhood, of talking to himself as if he were two persons. One of him was always vastly superior to and infinitely removed from the foibles of the other.

"Nice little practical idea of yours, wasn't it? You were in a funk, old chap, that's what you were!"

The other of him could not deny the soft impeachment.

"And now what are you going to do? Leave it in the cab, perhaps, to be fished out by some grinning 'red-cap.' It would mean a handsome tip for him and that would be about all."

With a sigh he opened his bag and deposited the shoes inside. He must think out another scheme. In the meantime they would be safer there.

The cab drew up at the entrance of the Grand Central Station and Dick alighted. Automatically he paid the chauffeur and,

with his bag gripped tightly in his hand, he sought and found the train for Meadow Bay.

As he stepped aboard the electric train, the open space between the cars caught and held his attention. For a moment, before he entered the car and sat down in the rear seat, he considered carefully the possibility it suggested.

"That's the great idea," he thought with a sudden feeling of relief. "That's really practical." Even his inner critic had nothing to say against it.

"All aboard!" The call, muffled by distance, floated down from the train gate.

"All aboard!" The cry was taken up in stentorian tones from the platform just beside him. "Step lively, please." The door slammed shut as the last passenger boarded the train.

Dick, wishing to have everything in readiness to take advantage of the most favorable moment which might present itself, leaned forward to open his bag—

"Well, Dickie Schuyler! What are you doing here and where are you going, my pretty maid?"

Dick's scowl was hurriedly exchanged for a smile as he looked up at the grinning face before him.

"Why, hello, Billy! How are you?" he cried in a tone that he meant to be cordial. He had never liked the plump young man who was unceremoniously squeezing himself into the other half of the seat and now he hated him inordinately.

The man had a profile of a Greek god and in real life there is nothing more expressive of conceit and stupidity. He was an idle chap, a gossip and a bore and could not have appeared at a more inopportune moment.

"I'll never be able to shake him," thought Dick disgustedly. Then, with momentarily recovered hope: "Where are you going, Billy?" he asked. Meadow Bay was a good way out. Perhaps—

"Why, Blakeslie asked me out for a week-end. I'm going to Meadow Bay."

"That's nice," said Dick with covert sarcasm. "So am I."

Billy Porter was delighted. He would have some one to talk at all the way. No

one else had much chance in conversation with this voluble young man and Dick's preoccupied silence passed unnoticed.

Suddenly Dick had a bright idea. Billy Porter was one of the few young men in the world who did not smoke. Dick bore the vain and sometimes malicious monologue of his companion for some time with all the patience at his command.

The tunnel was passed, the Harlem River crossed and after a time the railroad freed itself from the alternate flash and sudden darkness of cut and overhead crossing and swept out into the open country. The suburban towns with their self-consciously picturesque stations were more or less frequent, but there were wider spaces of unoccupied territory between. At last Dick's overstrained nerves could stand no more.

"I'm dying for a smoke, Billy," he said, rising and picking up his suit-case. "You won't mind if I leave you. See you later." And heedless of the surprise on his companion's face he gained the aisle and walked rapidly toward the front of the train.

"This will be just the place," he thought gleefully as the train ran into a long deep cut. "I'll chuck those infernal pumps over on the rails and they'll be ground to atoms."

The platform of the car was unoccupied and Dick set down his bag with a sigh of hope. In feverish haste he unbuckled the straps and was about to push up the catch when a voice behind him brought him to a sudden stop and set his heart down into his boots.

"Say, Dickie, wait a minute. I'll join you," and Porter lumbered onto the platform, bumping his golf clubs against the door as he closed it.

"I thought you didn't smoke, old chap," said Dick with a vaguely apologetic air.

"No more do I," answered Porter, "but I can stand the smell of the beastly stuff as well as anybody. No use your having to travel all the rest of the way by your lonely little self."

He was quite cheerful and unsuspecting. Dick cursed him in his heart with every frill and variation of a full repertoire but he gave no outward sign of annoyance.

"I was just about to get some cigars out of my bag," he said with apparent calm,

"but I think, after all, I'd rather have a cigarette."

Resignedly he buckled up the straps and followed his unwelcome companion to the smoking-car where Porter's monologue was resumed as if it had never been interrupted and Dick sank far down in his seat, resigning himself for the time being. Fate had stacked the cards against him, but he had by no means given up his purpose. He was no longer gripped by a panic fear and his sporting instincts were thoroughly aroused. By hook or by crook he would get rid of that infernal package in spite of all the odds against him.

He had not been listening very closely to the long story that Porter was telling when suddenly his attention was gripped and held.

"What was that you said, Billy?" he asked, and Porter repeated his previous sentence.

"I had just seen his wife at the theater with Pendleton, and behold, there was Hammond Rutledge going up the stairs to one of the private rooms with another man and two perfect peaches. I should judge, though I saw only their backs. I don't know whether you are familiar with 'Giuseppe's' place, Dickie. You fellows who don't care what you eat so long as it's in the most gay and gaudy sort of joint, wouldn't be likely to."

Here the young gourmet lapsed into a dissertation on the unrivaled joys of a purely Italian cuisine and Dick had a moment to think. The part that was known of his connection with the tragedy at Number 20 would be bound to come out in the early afternoon papers. He hated to be obliged to talk of it to a man like Porter, but his silence on the subject would be difficult to explain afterwards. It must be done and he braced his nerves for the ordeal.

"An awful thing about the Rutledges," he began. "You probably don't know it yet—"

"Oh, don't I?" interrupted his garrulous companion, jealous of the suggestion that anyone could be better informed than himself. "What I don't know about Inez Rutledge and her husband wouldn't fill a very large book. I was one of the first to

meet her when she burst on New York society with her beauty and her millions.

"My word, but she was the sensation of the season. You were abroad at the time I remember, so you may not have heard much about it. She was married before you came back, I think. Case of love at first sight with Rutledge, they say, and no wonder. The most beautiful woman I ever saw! And then all that money! What she saw in Hammond Rutledge, I don't know. He's good-looking, of course, but there are lots of handsomer men in New York," said Porter with a self-conscious smile.

"He has a very good social position, too," Porter ran on, "but everybody knows he hasn't any money to speak of. Of course, with all those Mexican oil wells that she inherited from her old Spanish father, Hammond's being poor didn't make any difference, I suppose. But he's a good deal older than she is and it's no wonder that she got tired of him and kept him on a short allowance."

"How do you know that?" asked Dick with ever increasing interest. He despaired, for the present, of telling his own story.

"Oh, it's common gossip. Everybody knows it. And now she's taken to running around with that chap Pendleton and everybody's talking. She doesn't seem to mind a bit and they say Hammond's as jealous as a fiend.

"Not that he cares for her any more, but he's proud and her recklessness is driving him crazy. Anybody can see it. He won't divorce her if he can help it, I suppose, on account of the money. He don't get much of it now, but there's oodles and oodles of it and if she dies he gets it all unless she's made a will, for I happen to know that she hasn't a relative in the world."

Dick's brows drew together sharply and he interrupted his companion with determination.

"Look here, Billy," he said, "what time last night did you see him?"

"Oh, I don't know," answered Porter carelessly. "Some time after midnight I should think. Why—"

"M-m-m-m-o Bay!" bawled the conductor, opening the car door.

"Good lord, I didn't realize—" said Porter, hastily collecting his bags.

Dick followed, a heavy suspicion forming itself in his mind. He did not know Rutledge at all well. Their circles of friends and acquaintances rarely touched; but he had seen him often and had been impressed by a sort of primitive strength in the man. Undoubtedly a strong personality, terrible perhaps, when roused—

His greeting to Blakeslie was preoccupied and for the first time Dick was grateful for Porter's exuberant loquacity. He knew that his reticence would not be understood if continued for any length of time, so as soon as he was able to get a word in, Dick electrified his audience with the story of his morning's experience, or at least as much of it as would afterward appear in the public press.

"I tried to tell Bill, on the way out," he concluded as they reached the house after a somewhat protracted drive, "but you know what he is, Blakeslie. I couldn't slip in a word."

Their host smiled knowingly and Porter grinned. He had resented Dick's usurpation of the limelight even for so short a time, but it would make a gorgeous bit of gossip to pass on.

"No wonder you were interested in my story of the Rutledges," he said as they ascended the steps together.

Dick reluctantly resigned his bag to the servant who met them at the door.

"I'll unpack myself," he said as the man who had shown him to his room set down the bag and waited for orders.

"Very good, sir. Thank you, sir," and the man vanished.

Dick locked the door softly and looked about the room. No available hiding-place presented itself and there was no key in the bureau drawers. He thought hard as he rapidly changed to the golf clothes which had been packed at the top of his capacious bag.

He made sure that the parcel Nora had entrusted to his care was still where he had put it, among his evening clothes at the very bottom. The pumps, still in their wrappings, lay on top. He covered them carefully, closed the bag and locked it.

"It's perfectly safe there," he assured himself, putting the key in his pocket. "No one could get away with a bag as big as that. Wish I dared to leave the room locked but it would look too queer in a house like this. And this is no place to try to dispose of it. I'll have to wait till I get back to town. Anyhow, it's all safe," and freeing his mind as much as possible from its unwonted cares, he went down to lunch.

CHAPTER X.

CAPTAIN O'MALLEY DEMONSTRATES.

IN the meantime, events had progressed with a hideous swiftness in the now shrouded and darkened house of mystery. The coroner, though late in coming, had proved quick and efficient. The surgeons, hastily summoned, had performed their task and gone.

They had fixed the time of death somewhere between midnight and four in the morning. The autopsy showed no marks or wounds of any kind except one in the back, narrow but deep, slanting slightly from left to right and piercing the heart through and through. Death from such a blow would have been instantaneous.

So far, no weapon had been found, but the surgeon's report stated that the one that had been used must have been a knife or dagger, over six inches long and sharp at the point and on one side.

Peter Clancy and Captain O'Malley stood for a moment in the hall after letting the surgeons out, discussing the results of the investigation. They had had a busy day and the older man looked gray and tired but the young detective was as fresh and alert as a pointer just loosed from the leash. O'Malley was demonstrating something to his eager pupil and assistant.

"You see," he said, "the knife entered here," touching Peter on the back just below the shoulder blade, "and went down this way," drawing a line with his stumpy forefinger downward and toward the spine.

"That means one of two things," he continued. "Either the blow was dealt by a person with very long arms, standing close in front of her, or the murderer stood be-

hind her and struck the blow with his left hand.

"If he had used his right while standing behind her, the course of the weapon would have been straight in or from right to left. You see that, don't you?"

"Sure," answered Peter eagerly. "What we've got to look for is a left-handed guy with a motive, or a long-armed gorilla with same outfit. I wish we could be sure which."

"You look for a man who prefers to use his south-paw and don't waste your time on the orang-utan theory," said O'Malley with conviction. "Tell you why later."

"Now the first thing we've got to do is to find out if anybody in this house could have worn the shoe that this came out of." He produced a leather insole as he spoke. "It's the best clue we've got and it ought to be a good one. See what you make out of it, Pete."

Clancy took it in his hand and considered it in silence for a minute.

"It was still damp when we found it. That makes it darned near certain that it was left here during the rain last night. It didn't start to rain till nearly midnight and it stopped a little after three this morning."

"Since the murder was committed about that time, the probabilities are that the man who wore that shoe knows a hell of a lot more about the crime than he's going to wish he did when we get onto his tracks."

O'Malley nodded. "Now what else?" he asked, grinning at Peter's excitement.

The young man felt the bit of leather carefully. "There's some marks of nails in the heel and it's worn smooth and shiny. Probably wouldn't have come out, either, if the shoes had been new. Must have been pumps, too, of course, by the same token. And what's this?"

He held the insole to the light.

"Look here, O'Malley," he cried. "Cast your eagle eye on this!"

"I saw it at once," rejoined O'Malley calmly and Peter felt a little piqued.

"Well, the gold is almost gone," he said defensively, "and without it the name hardly shows at all."

"Can you make it out?"

Peter applied his microscope. "There's

an 'O' and an 'N' on the first line pretty plain and a little 'on' under it, but the rest is all worn away."

He was puzzled for a minute. Then his face brightened.

"I've got it, captain—part of it anyway, and the rest ought to be easy," he cried. "The lower line is the address and the little 'on' would be the last letters of London. All we've got to do is to find a swell cobbler who says 'doncher know' and has a name ending with 'on' and we'll get the name of the beast that did the trick."

Except for his initial experience when he was a boy, in the affair of the Thirteenth Floor, this was Peter Clancy's first murder case and he was thrilled with it to the bone.

"An English boot-maker all right. But he may possibly have more than one customer," said O'Malley with a quizzical glance over the tops of his glasses.

"Well, we know the size and that ought to help," said Peter doggedly.

"It's a real clue anyway," said O'Malley, rather patronizingly, Peter thought, "and we'll follow it up at this end right away. Come on up-stairs."

"It's a gentleman's shoe," said Clancy as they climbed the long flight of stairs. "There's only one place to look."

"The shoes were old; they might have been given to a servant," O'Malley returned.

"Sure they might," agreed Peter. "They might have been given to me—but could I wear 'em? That pump was pretty close to an 'A' and you don't have feet that narrow when you beat it up and down stairs all day in one of these palatial joints."

Peter was several steps ahead of the heavier man and he now opened the first door he came to in the upper hall.

"Not in there," O'Malley cautioned him. "That's her room. They've taken the body in there. We'll search that room later."

The open door showed a room, vast in its dimness. On the bed, which stood directly opposite the door, lay a shrouded figure and over the head, in strange contrast to the frivolous French silken canopy, a silver crucifix glimmered in the gloom.

Clancy closed the door softly and the two men went on to the front of the house.

One glance in at the open door of the front room showed it to be the sitting-room or boudoir of a woman of expensive and bizarre taste. The walls were paneled with wood, painted a dull white and hung with cloth of silver. The floor was covered with a soft rug of solid black.

The furniture was all old Spanish, heavily carved, its dark wood blackened with age. The silver tone of the wall was taken up in cushion and window drapery. There was no color at all in the room except a great splash of scarlet embroidery over the fireplace which seemed to break the silence with a poignant cry.

Peter Clancy was not given to fancies, but an irresistible throb of memory brought before him, as in a vision, a still, white face with mocking, scarlet lips. O'Malley, being older, was less affected by the strange quality of the room.

"Her husband, do you suppose?" he asked, pointing to a large photograph in an ornate silver frame standing on a table near the door.

Peter looked attentively at the portrait. It was that of a young man of remarkable beauty, there was no other word for it. His dreaming, dark eyes looked out from a face perfect in its modeling except that the lips were, perhaps, a trifle too full and the chin not sufficiently pronounced.

"Don't look to me like anybody's *husband*," said Peter, with a worldly wisdom beyond his years.

"Well, I suppose we'll know soon now. Funny he hasn't shown up before this. We'd better look at his rooms before he comes, if we can, they must be on the floor above." And O'Malley led the way up the stair.

The rooms on this floor were in striking contrast to the rest of the house. A man's rooms, unmistakably, and conventional to the last degree. After a quick glance all about, Clancy and the captain made a bee line, each for a closet door.

"Here they are, captain," Peter called and O'Malley joined him at once.

They wasted no time on the various boots, high and low, but proceeded immediately to examine a row of light dancing-shoes at the top of the rack.

"The pair we're looking for won't be here, of course," said O'Malley, rapidly removing one of the trees, "but the maker's name would probably be the same. Let's see—"

"William Fosdick, New York and London," he read after an instant's pause. "That's not it."

A sharp cry from Clancy caused him to turn quickly.

"Holy mother of Mike! We've hit it first clip!" Clancy exclaimed, wild with excitement.

He had fitted the tell-tale piece of leather into a pump which he held in his hand. Save for a slight difference in the shape of the toe, the lines of the two soles coincided to a hair.

CHAPTER XI.

HAMMOND RUTLEDGE.

"CAPTAIN O'MALLEY, Captain O'Malley, ye're wanted below!" The voice of Murphy, muffled by distance came floating up through the silence. He was nearer, just below on the stairs, when he spoke again. "It's himself," he called softly as O'Malley appeared at the door. "I just let him in through the basement."

"Fix things up here and come down, Pete," said the captain, turning hurriedly back. "Rutledge has turned up at last. You'll want to hear what he has to say," and O'Malley followed the policeman down to the main-floor.

The man who awaited him was standing still in the middle of the library. He had the dazed look of one awakened suddenly from a painful dream, the horror of which he had not been able to shake off.

He was very tall and well set up, with a comparatively short body and unusually long arms and legs. He had a narrow, well-shaped nose, the nostrils mobile like those of a well-bred horse, deep-set dark eyes, proud lips and a bold, clean-cut jaw and chin. His black, stiff hair was already graying at the temples.

"Shall we go into the dining-room? It's lighter there," said O'Malley, after intro-

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ducing himself and Clancy who had appeared almost immediately.

Rutledge nodded ascent and in silence the three men seated themselves at the heavy old refectory table which stood in the center of the bright sunshiny room.

"I knew nothing until I saw it here." Rutledge's voice was deep and troubled as he spread out the afternoon paper he had been holding clenched in his left hand. There were staring headlines at the top and he folded it together again quickly, with a movement of horror.

The other two men were studying him closely. Not a tremor of the strong dark face betrayed the least previous knowledge of the crime.

"I was on my way to the train when I heard the newsboys calling an extra." The frowning black eyebrows made a straight line across his forehead and Rutledge clenched his hands as if to hold fast his self-control. He closed his eyes for an instant and the muscles of his jaws contracted with the setting of his teeth. His face showed a purposeful reserve, but there was little in it of the expression of a man bowed down with grief.

To give him a moment's time, O'Malley related, in as few words as possible, the events of the morning, omitting, however, any mention of the clues that had been discovered.

"We tried to reach you at every place the servants could suggest," he concluded. "The maid seemed to think that you went out to the country yesterday—"

"I was detained unexpectedly," Rutledge interrupted hastily. "I was on my way to the country when I—" He motioned toward the paper.

"I see," said O'Malley quietly, and Rutledge continued.

"Some friends called me up just as I was leaving and asked me to dine with them. It was late when the party broke up and I was not expected here, so I spent the night at the Wilmont."

"And you reached there at about what time, do you remember?"

Rutledge eyed his interlocutor narrowly. "I don't know exactly," he replied after an almost imperceptible pause. "It was late,

somewhere between two and three, I think."

"Just for form's sake," said O'Malley smoothly, "we'd like to know the names of your friends."

The hesitation this time was more apparent. At last Rutledge spoke. "There were ladies in the party," he said slowly. "Is it necessary to give their names?"

O'Malley replied with a counter-question. "How many were there in the party?" he asked.

"There were Wallace Campbell, of Campbell & Fitzgerald, two ladies and myself."

"I think it would be advisable for you to tell us the names of at least one of the ladies. In all probability it will not be necessary to publish it, so it can do her no harm."

Rutledge thought a moment. "Can you assure me that the papers won't get hold of it?" he asked.

O'Malley spread out his hands with a reassuring gesture. "We will conduct the case as quietly as we can, in the interests of all concerned," he said. "It doesn't usually help the cause of justice much to advertise what the police are able to find out."

Rutledge seemed relieved by the old man's friendly tone. "I see no harm then in telling you that Irene Clairmont was one of the party."

"The actress?"

"Yes."

"And the other lady?"

"You implied that one name would be sufficient."

"Probably will be, but it's our trade to find out all we can," said O'Malley with a semi-apologetic smile. He did not press the point. It ought to be comparatively easy to find out who the lady was in case it became necessary to know.

"Would you mind writing out the two addresses for me, Mr. Rutledge?" he asked, drawing a small pad from his pocket and laying a pencil beside it.

Peter understood the old man's motive. Rutledge picked up the pencil with his left hand and the young detective held his breath. But Rutledge passed the pencil over to his right hand and wrote as requested. Peter looked at the paper as it

lay on the table in front of him. The writing was cramped and well-nigh illegible.

After a few more pertinent questions, O'Malley, referring to his notes, asked quietly. "This Mr. Cuthbert Pendleton who dined and went out with Mrs. Rutledge last night was an old friend of the family, was he not?"

Clancy, who had been watching in intent silence, saw a quick change come over Rutledge's face. The look, instantly suppressed, was one of fierce and malignant hatred.

"Pendleton came here often," said Rutledge in a controlled voice. "You might call him that, yes."

"What kind of a man is he?"

"A sort of 'tame cat,'" Rutledge answered, striving to speak quietly. "The kind of man women like to have dangling about. It's a common species."

He rose from his place and with long, pantherlike strides crossed to the window. He returned in a moment, his face set like a mask. As he resumed his seat, O'Malley spoke:

"Do you think that Mr. Pendleton—"

"I'd rather not talk about him," said Rutledge grimly. "He'll tell you all you want to know."

"But we haven't been able to locate him," said O'Malley with a watchful glance at the other man's face. "No one seems to know where he is."

Rutledge looked up sharply. "That's strange," he said. His eyes took on the fixed look of one who considers remote and perplexing possibilities.

Peter, at the request of his superior, related his conversation with Pendleton's chauffeur.

"I don't understand it," said Rutledge when Clancy had finished. "His not leaving an address was probably due to carelessness. Unless—" He did not finish the sentence and after a slight pause, O'Malley proceeded.

When questioned about the servants it appeared that Hammond Rutledge knew nothing at all about the cook except that she was a very good cook, indeed. Mrs. Rutledge's personal maid, who had left a few days previously, he described as a pretty little thing with a quick tongue and

a violent temper, whose impertinence had made it necessary to discharge her. He had no idea where she had gone. Anna MacLeod had been with the family ever since he, Rutledge, was born, and was absolutely faithful and devoted.

"And the girl, Nora?" O'Malley asked.

"I've only seen her about here for a few months," Rutledge answered. "She's a quiet, soft-spoken little Irish girl and as you have probably noticed, of exceptional beauty. Mrs. Rutledge"—he did not once speak of her as "my wife"—"seemed to like her very much."

He thought a moment. Then he said:

"In fact, there was something a little queer in the way Mrs. Rutledge seemed to take to her. She may be a good masseuse. At any rate, she and Mrs. Rutledge often spent more than an hour together in Mrs. Rutledge's room with the door locked.

"And now I remember an odd thing that happened one day, not so very long ago. I had come home early and was on my way up to my room when, in passing the open door of Mrs. Rutledge's boudoir, I chanced to see something in the room that attracted my attention and stopped to look at it."

He did not mention what the object was that attracted him, but the expression of anger which flashed across his face brought suddenly to Peter's mind the man's portrait which had so much interested O'Malley and himself and he had little doubt as to the cause of Rutledge's temper and the name of the original of the photograph.

Rutledge had gone on without pause:

"I heard Mrs. Rutledge in the next room talking to some one. The other voice was low but it had a pleading note in it that was quite perceptible. Then, quite distinctly, I heard Mrs. Rutledge say: 'You'd better be careful, Eleanor. Remember, you're in my power.' Her voice sounded angry and I was surprised, a moment later as I went on up the stairs, to see the girl, Nora, come out of the room."

"Odd," said O'Malley. "It was this girl who discovered the body and gave the alarm."

"Yes, I know. It was in the papers."

"And you're sure she called her 'Eleanor'?"

"Yes, quite sure. Nothing so strange in that, 'Nora' being the diminutive for 'Eleanor.'"

"Perhaps not," said O'Malley, meditatively.

After a few more questions, O'Malley looked at his watch and rose.

"The inquest is called for four o'clock and it's nearly that now," he said.

Rutledge rose also and faced the old man across the width of the table.

"I want the murderer found!" he said, bringing his open hand down hard on the table. "Leave no stone unturned! Call on me for any money you may need and get the best assistance procurable. You are to have access to the house at all times."

He took from his pocket a bunch of keys and selecting several, laid them on the table, designating the doors to which they belonged. "You'll have to be careful in closing the inner street-door," he cautioned, "as there is something the matter with the lock and it sometimes doesn't catch. I have given orders to have it repaired but I'm not sure it has been done. Test it when you close it to be sure that it is fast." He fixed O'Malley with piercing eyes.

"I'm trusting you to follow up every clue to the bitter end. There is nothing in all the world that I desire so much as to bring this criminal to justice!"

His voice rang like the clash of swords. If it was a "bluff," it was magnificently done.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CORONER'S VERDICT.

THERE was little time left before the inquest and Hammond Rutledge ran quickly up the three flights of stairs to the housekeeper's room. He wished to make all the necessary arrangements with the greatest possible speed. The atmosphere of the house stifled him and he longed to be clear of it.

He received an immediate response to his hurried knock and at once opened the door. The old housekeeper was just rising from her knees beside the bed.

"You've been praying for me, my good

old Anna," he said, gently helping her to her feet, "and I've needed your prayers this many and many a day."

"Oh, my bairn, my poor laddie," cried the old woman bitterly, "what dreadful sorrows that wicked woman has brought into your life!"

"Hush, Anna, hush," he said gravely. "It is over now." He drew a long, deep sigh. "And it was worse for you, in many ways, than it was for me. Don't think I haven't seen all the slights and unkindnesses you have borne so quietly for my sake."

His emotion broke through his habitual reserve and the master-spoke to his old faithful servant as one true friend to another. "I haven't said much—a man can't, you know. Sometimes I was afraid you wouldn't be able to bear it—"

His hand rested tenderly on her shoulder, but Anna MacLeod drew back.

"Oh, I don't care for myself!" she exclaimed. "You must know that. I'm thinking only of you! For what she has done to you—oh, Heavenly Father, for what she did to my boy—I hate her!" She clenched her hands, her strong old face working strangely. "She was a scarlet woman," she said fiercely. "It doesn't matter now if you know. I've been sure of it all along! The suspicion I saw in your eyes when you came home last night was well founded."

Her voice had risen by imperceptible degrees. With a peremptory gesture, Rutledge laid his hand across her lips.

"Hush, Anna," he said again, his stern eyes upon hers. "Be careful what you say!"

He crossed the room in two long strides and softly opened and closed the door. The hall was empty.

When he turned back, Anna MacLeod was standing still where he had left her. The long habit of self-restraint of the trained servant schooled her to repression, and her face had assumed most of its habitual stern quietude.

"My bairn, my poor bairn," she said again, and as she said it her stern old Scotch face softened, and she gave him such a tender, loving look that he stooped

suddenly and kissed her. She was pleased and surprised and flushed a little under the unexpected caress.

"I think you're the best friend I have in the world, Anna," he said with feeling, "and I want to see that you're well taken care of whatever happens. I'll have to close the house here. I couldn't stay in it nor leave you in it now, since this awful thing has happened."

A long shudder ran over him from head to foot, but he had himself in hand in an instant.

"Would you like to go out to Tuxedo to stay?" he continued. "I'll close the house there, but I'll leave Michael Flannery and his wife in charge. They'd make you comfortable."

"It's kind of you, sir," she replied, "and like you, but I never got on with they two. They're Irish, and the Scotch and Irish don't mix. I've been thinking what I would do all this long day.

"I've an old friend, a widow woman, who keeps a very nice lodgings. She's had a bad year, and has several rooms vacant. I'd be comfortable there, and maybe you'd come to see me at times—"

"Indeed I will, Anna. I'll come often."

A few moments later, having given the necessary instructions for paying off the other servants and so forth, he left her, a fervent "God be wi' you, my bairn," still ringing in his ears.

As he came down the stairs he was aware of a commotion in the hall below. He heard O'Malley's voice raised angrily, and several indistinguishable sentences, spoken excitedly in a voice he had not heard before. Evidently something untoward had happened. There was the sound of running feet, and he followed the noise down into the basement.

Entering the kitchen at the back, he saw two policemen standing in the middle of the floor, staring at each other blankly. They turned as he came into the room.

"You can search me," said one with a gesture of despair.

"What is it?" asked Rutledge sternly. "What has happened?"

"The cook, sir!" He opened his hands and spread out his arms. "She *jist wint!*"

Through the open door at the back of the room, O'Malley could be seen standing beside the fence half-way down the yard. He turned a worried, discomfited face as Hammond Rutledge came toward him.

"I wish to hell I'd known about this," cried the old man, pointing to a half-open door in the fence. "They told me there was no way out at the back!"

"Who told you that?"

"The girl, Nora! I suppose I ought to have seen for myself. I did look out of the dining-room window, but I don't believe any one could have seen it from there. There's not a bit of difference between the door and the rest of the fence, and this damn vine hid the latch."

He pointed to a large old wistaria vine in full leaf that came up from the ground between the door and the house and hung in masses all along the top of the fence.

"She might not have known it was there," said Rutledge, referring to Nora. "I didn't myself. I only rent the house, and I don't believe I've ever been out in the yard before."

O'Malley gave him a quick glance. It was difficult for a man of the people to understand the detachment of a wealthy master from all of the concerns and surroundings of his servants.

"How do you suppose there ever came to be a gate here?" asked O'Malley. "It is very unusual in a city block."

"I don't know," said Rutledge. "These houses were built some time ago, and some of them must have had many owners. Perhaps this house and No. 22 were at one time owned by friends or relatives whose children played together. Something like that, I imagine. What are you doing about following up the cook?"

His tone was severe, and O'Malley was on the defensive at once.

"Clancy has gone over to find out what they know in the next house. He'll bring in all the returns, and do it quicker than two could. Here he comes now."

"She went out that way all right, all right," said the young man, panting with haste and excitement. "The family have gone to the country, and there was no one on deck but an old caretaker, pounding her

ear in the kitchen. She says the servants in the two houses were friends, and used this gate a lot. Their butler was sweet on one of the maids here.

"The cook went through nearly an hour ago—said she wanted to get out to meet a friend. It wasn't her day off, and she didn't want any one to know she was going. The old dame didn't get wise to anything because they all do it. She's been in the back part of the house all day and didn't know that there was any trouble over here. Wouldn't it jar you?"

O'Malley looked very much crestfallen. "She's got an hour's start," he said as they returned to the kitchen, "but we ought to be able to find her. Here, Sullivan, you haven't got much sense, but you know what she looks like better than anybody here—at least you know how well she can cook, don't you?" He pointed to two empty beer mugs and the remains of a hearty meal that stood on the table. "She treated you fine, didn't she?"

"She's a dom foine cook, Oi'll say that for her, and she give me a pippin of a lunch," said Sullivan, and added defensively, "Oi was towld to watch the basement-dure, and Oi done it all roight. Oi've sat most of the entoire day on one chair wid me fate on another roight across the dure."

"Oi won't say that Oi moightn't have dozed a bit afther lunch, but a cat couldn't have gone in or out widout wakin' me, Oi slape that loight. And, annyway, no wan towld me there was annythin' ag'in' her."

O'Malley felt that he, himself, had been remiss and wasn't inclined to let Sullivan down too hard. "All right," he said crisply, "that 'll be about all from you. Now beat it over to headquarters and tell them to put the best man they've got in on the job—and get a move on!" And Sullivan, glad to be let off so easily, "beat it" as directed.

It was growing late, and the cabs that were to take the remaining witnesses to the coroner's office were already at the door. The old housekeeper presently came down the steps, leaning on Hammond Rutledge's arm, and Nora followed close behind. Her beautiful face was pale but composed.

The coroner had had a busy day and was tired. He had called the inquest for that afternoon, late as it was, for he wanted to go down to Atlantic City for Saturday and Sunday, as he had previously planned, to recuperate from his late illness. The examination, therefore, was brief, and the hastily summoned jury brought in their verdict almost immediately:

"Wilful murder, at the hands of a person or persons unknown."

CHAPTER XIII.

"YOU NEVER CAN TELL."

IT was nearing midnight and all the tragic house lay bathed in silence and darkness save for a light that burned high and clear in the dining-room where, behind drawn blinds, two men sat talking earnestly.

The body of Inez Rutledge had been removed early in the evening, and, except for the two men, the house that had been a witness of her fate was empty. The old housekeeper, with bag and baggage, had departed early in the evening. Hammond Rutledge, having made the necessary arrangements for the removal of his wife's body, had gone to a hotel for the night.

The girl, Nora, had seemed a little vague as to her plans. She had given an address in old Greenwich Village, with the statement that any mail or messages would be forwarded to her by a Mr. Vincent Quartley, who lived there, if directed to her in his care.

"I'm not altogether easy in my mind about that girl," said O'Malley, leaning his heavy arms on the old refectory table and looking over his glasses at Clancy, "and I'm having her shadowed."

"There was something doing between her and Mrs. Rutledge. That's pretty plain," said Peter, "but there was nothing suspicious in her room. I searched it to beat the band before she left. It didn't take long. She had the usual servant's outfit, and not much of it at that."

"I know," said O'Malley, ruminating over his cigar. "Maybe it's because she's so pretty and innocent-looking, but I can't

think she had anything to do with the actual crime. I'm too old, though, to be bulldozed by a pretty face. And you never can tell by appearances.

"Why, this morning, coming down in the subway, there was an old chap sat next to me reading the paper. He had on a shiny frock coat, green with age, and he wore regular 'Uncle Sam' chin whiskers—the kind you wouldn't expect to see outside of Brooklyn—and what do you think he was reading? You'll never guess. I looked over his shoulder, as you will, you know, and he was reading 'What Every Bride Should Know.'

"No, you never can tell," continued the captain, supplementing Peter's laugh with a short, thick chuckle. "We've got to find the motive somehow, and I can't see how this girl stood to gain anything by Mrs. Rutledge's death. The object evidently wasn't robbery, for Mr. Rutledge and I went all over the house together, and he assured me that nothing had been taken.

"Anyhow, and whatever the motive, I have a hunch that this job was pulled off by a man. Nora might have been a confederate, of course, so might the cook, damn her. But the actual job was done by a man, and I'll tell you why—"

"There's the man's shoe-sole," advanced Peter.

"Yes, yes, of course," interrupted O'Malley hastily, "and there's something else you seem to have forgotten."

He fumbled in his pocket as he spoke and brought out his big pocketbook. Slipping off the elastic band which held it, he drew out an envelope and shook from it the paper of matches and the burnt ends he had found in the hall that morning.

"A skirt don't usually carry matches around," Peter agreed.

"No, and what would anybody that didn't smoke want with matches in a house lit with electricity?" asked O'Malley.

Peter nodded and, for a moment, studied the short match-ends lying on the table.

"There are five of 'em," he said slowly, "and there weren't any ashes around. Whoever used 'em must have been looking for something and didn't want to turn on the light."

"Good lad," said O'Malley approvingly. "The weapon, perhaps, or to see if he'd left any traces. Now, look at this. Notice anything queer about it?"

Clancy took the paper of matches held out to him by the astute old captain.

"Looks like any old matches to me," said Peter after a moment. "Got one just like it myself," and he drew from his pocket a paper, the exact counterpart of the other, except that it had not been used.

"Give me a light," said O'Malley suddenly. "My cigar's gone out. No, not that paper, you fool! Your own, and don't get 'em mixed."

Peter, blushing at his carelessness, pulled a match from his own paper, struck it, and extended the light. The old man deliberately blew it out.

"What's the great idea?" asked Clancy, slightly annoyed.

"Now light me another," said the captain—and blew out the second match.

"Once more," he said.

"I don't get you," said Peter, holding out the third match.

Captain O'Malley took it in his own hand, relit his cigar and puffed contentedly.

"You'll make a hell of a fine detective, Pete," he taunted. "Look at your paper of matches."

Peter complied angrily. He was young and eager, and the older man's air of superiority rankled. He laid the two papers side by side on the table, comparing them. Suddenly his face cleared.

"Gee, I've got to hand it to you, captain," he cried. "You old Sherlock Holmes! Of course! I see it now!"

He grinned delightedly.

"I take up the matches, so," he said, demonstrating with his own. "I pull off a match and strike it like this," suiting the action to the word.

"But this gink, he took the matches, every one, from the left side of the paper. There are only one, two, three, four, five, six here, and they're all on the right-hand side.

"That means that he must have held the paper in his right hand and pulled 'em off and struck 'em with his left. No right-handed man would ever do that. Try it."

"I have," said O'Malley dryly. "It struck me when I first looked at them. That's why I said to can the gorilla idea. It was a man that did the trick, and he's left-handed. The direction of the wound and those matches prove it."

"But, O'Malley," objected Peter, on his nettle, "a woman might have taken the matches there to look for something."

"Possibly," admitted the captain; "but she'd be much more likely to use a box. There are lots of them in the kitchen, but I couldn't find any papers of matches except in Mr. Rutledge's rooms. And you seem to forget the man's insole that fitted that same gentleman's shoe."

Peter was dashed. "Of course," he muttered, and added: "but Mr. Rutledge writes with his right hand."

O'Malley drew a book toward him from the far end of the table.

"I looked it up while you were upstairs," he said. "Read that."

He opened the book at a place he had already marked with a bit of newspaper torn from a crumpled sheet that lay on the floor where Rutledge had dropped it earlier in the day. It was part of a head-line, and on the fragment was printed the one ominous word "murder."

The book was a copy of "Who's Who" of that year, and Peter read, partly aloud and partly to himself:

"Hammond Griffith Rutledge—hm-m-m—Zodiac Club, New Chemistry Club—Experimental chemist—retired—educated in Germany, graduate of Heidelberg University—"

O'Malley stopped him. "Know any Germans, Pete?" he asked. "Not German-Americans, but real, honest-to-God Germans."

"Sure," said Peter, and after a minute's silence—"Good night! I got you this time for sure. Over there they teach 'em to be am-am— I never could say that darned word—they teach 'em to use both hands."

"You're on," said O'Malley, grinning. The boy was bright, there was no getting around it, and the man who gave him a good chance would be doing a public service.

"Now look at the two other places I've

marked," O'Malley continued. "We're traveling in high society these days."

The first was a short account of Cuthbert Pendleton, bachelor, his home and club addresses, his university, his father's and mother's names, and that was practically all. Evidently this young man's history was yet to be written.

"Didn't think that one would be in there," said the captain as Peter turned to the last mark in the book. "But, as I said before, you never can tell."

Clancy glanced at the page and learned that Vincent Quartley was unmarried; that the address Nora had given was really his, and, among less interesting items, that his father was Tremont Quartley.

"Now what d'you think of that," Peter exclaimed. "Wouldn't that jolt your dome? Why, Tremont Quartley's one of the biggest old money grabbers in this burg. What's his son got to do with a poor servant? Of course she's dead easy to look at, but, at that, she doesn't seem like—"

"You never can tell, my son," said O'Malley, and again, more slowly—"You—never—can—tell."

CHAPTER XIV.

A SECRET.

AT about the same hour, Richard Schuyler said "good night" to his cordial host and the other guests and sought his room. He had enjoyed his afternoon on the golf-course, for youth is youth, and reacts quickly to the stimuli of open air and exercise.

There had been a good deal of merriment at lunch and dinner over the fact that he drank nothing but water. He turned it aside by saying that he was getting fat and was going into training, and could not be seduced from the straight and narrow path even by the pink deliciousness of a Bacardi cocktail.

It was partly due to this unwonted abstemiousness, perhaps, that a great weight seemed to fall upon him as he opened his door. He had a presentiment of evil which could not be shaken off. The darkness of the moonless night brought back with terri-

ble force the events of the past hours, and he was thankful that the lights in the room had already been lit.

He had locked his bag again after taking out his evening clothes. The servants might possibly think it odd if they noticed it, but, of course, that did not matter.

He divested himself of his outer garments and went over to the bed for his pajamas, expecting to find them, folded as usual, below the edge of the smoothly turned sheets.

"Oh, you chump," he said to himself, "you forgot to take 'em out of the bag."

He searched in his trouser's pocket and soon found his keys. His bag lay on a low stool in one corner of the room. The light from the shaded lamp on the table fell short, and he had a moment's trouble with the key, but the lock turned almost immediately, and he lifted the lid.

"I'll get rid of you yet," he said to the parcel containing his pumps which lay in one corner. "I'll get rid of you yet," he repeated with determination, "so watch yourself!"

He pulled out his pajamas as he spoke and caught hold of the dressing-gown which lay beneath them. As he jerked its heavy silken folds from the bag, something that had been caught in them fell with a light, metallic sound to the polished floor.

"What—oh, the devil!" he cried, and dropped to his knees.

The packet that Nora had given him to take care of for her had burst its bonds in falling and lay open before him.

It had evidently been wrapped in haste, and the string had parted or come untied. Stooping to pick it up, he had a vivid vision of the girl's wonderful face when she handed it to him and he tried with all his loyal manhood not to see what was in it. But the paper was stiff and its contents slippery, and as he hurriedly put it on the table, an object slid out and lay before him in the full bright light of the lamp.

He gasped for breath and put both hands up to his wildly throbbing temples.

Looking up at him, with the smile he knew so well on those scarlet lips, was the face of Inez Rutledge. The eyes were open now, and their expression was singularly

vital and compelling. He picked up the miniature in its heavy gold frame and examined it closely.

What connection was there between Nora, the maid, with the healthy fresh beauty of the mountain laurel, and this luxurious, seductive, strange woman of the sophisticated world? The things were hers, Nora had said. And that meant—what? He considered these and many other questions for a long time, and gave them up at last.

He put the portrait back on the table.

"I'll wrap it up again, securely this time—and then what shall I do? I ought to turn it over to the police," he thought. Every fiber of his being cried out at such a course.

"No, I'll be hanged if I will! The girl had no doubt that I was a gentleman. She trusted me with her secret, and before God, I believe that it's an innocent one as she said!"

He had spread out the paper. It contained nothing more except a flat, leather case, partly wrapped in a soft piece of old, white cloth, which was still folded as it had been when the miniature lay inside.

With a steady determination he curbed a strong desire to open the case. What he had seen had been entirely by accident. He would do nothing, of his own will, to violate the girl's confidence.

He would see her at once when he went back to town and tell her what had happened. He owed that to himself, and perhaps she would explain. He hoped, with a hope so acute that it surprised himself, that she would, and that her explanation would prove simple and convincing.

He slipped the leather case from its wrapping. "Somehow, I don't know why, I'd stake my life on that girl's honesty," he said. He shook out the cloth and laid it on the table beside the miniature of Inez Rutledge.

"My God!" he whispered. "Oh, my God!"

The cloth was a long strip, torn off irregularly from some garment. It had been folded lengthwise, and the part that lay exposed had been inside and hidden until now.

On its white surface lay a dark-red streak or smear, narrow and sharp at one end and at the other, broad and bleared, as if the cloth had been used to wipe something—something narrow and thin and covered with blood.

CHAPTER XV.

AN S. O. S.

AFTER one horrified look, Richard Schuyler, with a convulsive movement of fear and loathing, caught the extreme end of the cloth and folded it together so that the stain was hidden. His mind was in chaos, and his only instinctive desire was, to hide this damning piece of evidence from even his own staring eyes.

He laid the minature of Inez Rutledge face down upon the cloth, and, steeling his nerves, he carefully wrapped it, together with the leather case, as nearly as possible in the way in which it had been delivered to him, securing the string with two square knots.

There should be no danger of its giving way again. When he had finished, he replaced it in his bag, which he locked. For the moment there seemed to be no safer place.

Shivering with cold and excitement, he slipped on his dressing-gown and sat for a long time, thinking. The more he thought the less clear the situation appeared. In what conceivable circumstances could an honest, innocent girl have come into possession of such a combination of evidence?

Schuyler, for so young a man, was an unusually keen judge of character, and rarely found himself at fault. There had been something equivocal in the very first circumstances of his knowledge of Nora, and everything he had learned of her since had been mystifying in the extreme—and yet the force of her personality was such that he could not bring himself to consider seriously the possibility of a guilty participation on her part in the tragedy at No. 20. The fact of his own innocent complicity in the same dark event also had its weight.

"Circumstantial evidence is the most un-

dependable thing in the world, as I know from my own experience," he said to himself at last. "I'll give her the benefit of the doubt to the last ditch. I'll arrange to leave here in some natural way, the first thing in the morning. Then I'll see her somehow and make her open this infernal package in my presence on the plea that she must assure herself that the contents are intact.

"That ought to be easy when I explain how it came open while in my care. If she refuses, it will mean much. If she doesn't, I ought to be able to learn something from her face even if she will not explain. I won't do anything to defeat the ends of justice once I'm convinced—but it would take a lot to make me think—"

Dick Schuyler tossed restlessly on his pillow, planning and arguing throughout the long night. He rose before the household was astir and went out for a walk. That it was not wholly to quiet his nerves was evinced by the purposeful way in which he set off in a definite direction.

The nearest village was over a mile away, but he covered the distance in record time, and it was still early when he entered the telephone booth of its largest drug-store and closed the door carefully.

There was a long wait before he made his connection, and the voice at the other end of the line sounded sleepy. "Hello, yes. What is it?"

"Hello. Is that you, Jimmy? This is Dick Schuyler."

"Dick!" The voice took on an accent of surprise. "What the devil do you mean, calling me out of bed at this hour of the morning?"

"You're lazy, Jimmie. It's after eight, and I couldn't bear it any longer. This is an S. O. S."

"The devil it is! What's the matter, and where are you?"

"I'm supposed to be at Blakeslie's, but I'm talking from a booth in the nearest drug-store. Now, listen, Jimmie. I came down here expecting to have a peaceful week-end, and who do you think turned up on the train? Billy Porter, no less!"

"Oh, Lord!" The tone was one of heartfelt commiseration.

"You get me, I see, old man. I stood it yesterday and last night, but I can't face to-day and to-morrow listening to that empty-headed Adonis talking, talking, talking till you wish you were dead. He sticks like a burr, and there's no way out but to vanish."

"I know, old chap. I've been there myself. What do you want me to do?"

"You're a good scout, Jimmie. I knew you'd help me out. Call me up at Blakeslie's in about an hour—the number is Meadow Bay 7—got that? And tell me that the contracts for the Whittlesey business must be signed to-day."

"Blakeslie knows that I've been anxious to get that settled so I could leave town, and he won't get wise to the fact that I can't stand his taste in guests. No use to hurt anybody's feelings if it can be avoided."

"All right, Dickie. I'm on, old man. Meadow Bay 7. Call you in an hour. So-long."

"So-long, and thank you, Jimmie. You're a brick!"

"Don't mention it, Dickie. If you stopped asking your legal adviser to help you out of some scrape or other, I'd think your love had grown cold. This one's easy. Good-by, old scout. Call you later."

Dick Schuyler smiled a little as he hung up the receiver. Jimmie Stone was a man to be trusted, and he might have to ask his advice later. At present he meant to keep his perplexities, so far as possible, "under his own hat."

In spite of his confidence in his friend, Dick was rather silent all through breakfast, which the men of the house-party took together in the sunny breakfast-room. He was chaffed a good deal about his reformed habits as evinced by his abstemiousness of the night before and his early morning walk; but he bore it with a smile of conscious superiority. They were just leaving the table when a servant entered and announced that Mr. Schuyler was wanted on the phone.

Dick answered with alacrity, and a few moments later was making his regretful excuses to his host.

On looking at the time-table it was found

that he had just missed the 9.47 train, but Blakeslie assured him that the next one would give him ample time to reach Jimmie Stone's office before noon, which would be closing time on Saturday.

Dick chafed inwardly at the delay, but had to possess his soul in patience. He was on the door-step, with his precious bag beside him, long before the car which was to take him to the station put in an appearance. He breathed a sigh of relief as, at last, he settled himself in the train and concentrated his mind on the course he must pursue in unraveling the mystery connected with Nora, which occupied his thoughts to the exclusion of everything else.

His own troubles had been so relegated to the background that he had forgotten the very existence of the pumps in his bag. So engrossed was he that he lost all sense of the passage of time, and it was with a start that he came back to earth as the train pulled into the Grand Central station.

A short time later a cab stopped in front of No. 18, and Richard Schuyler alighted. The closed entrance and darkened windows of the house next door filled him with a sense of awe which he mastered with an effort.

"I must know where she is" (that pronoun had but one antecedent now in Dick's mind) "and Clancy is my best bet. She may have left here, but the police ought to know where she's to be found. A little interest on my part would seem natural in the circumstances," he thought as he rang the basement bell of No. 20.

"Clancy's here, all roight, and he's alone, too," said Murphy in answer to Dick's questions; "but he's terrible busy. Oi dunno if he'll see yez, Mr. Schuyler, but Oi'll ask. Jist wait here a minute."

"Yez can come up, sor," called Murphy an instant later from half-way down the stairs. "He's in the dinin'-room, through the dure at yer left as ye go up."

Peter Clancy had had a busy morning. He and O'Malley had given the house the "once over" the evening before, but the time was short, and Peter was not satisfied. Now there was not a room or closet, not a drawer or cupboard that had not been subjected to the closest scrutiny.

So far as he could tell, everything seemed to be in order, and he had Mr. Rutledge's assurance that no valuables were missing. How far he could trust that gentleman's word he was not sure. Hammond Rutledge appeared sincere in his desire to have the murderer brought to justice, but—

"There's one piece of evidence that must be investigated P. D. Q.," thought Clancy, laying the microscope he had been using down on the open pages of a classified telephone directory, and rising to greet Richard Schuyler.

From under the edge of the large red book peeped an inch of black leather. The blood rushed to Dick's head as he recognized the apparently inoffensive object, but he managed to answer Clancy's greeting with a good show of unconcern. In his preoccupation with Nora's affairs the fact that he was still carrying his tell-tale pumps about with him had been driven entirely out of his mind.

They seemed now to dance into the foreground of his consciousness with an impish perversity, and he cursed himself for his old habit of concentration which made it impossible for him to think of two things at once. He might have disposed of them on the train, easily, if he had only thought of it before it was too late.

"Phew! It's hot in here," said Dick, taking off his hat and using it as a fan. "Why don't you open some of the windows?"

"I didn't notice that it was hot," said Peter with a laugh. "Been too busy, I guess. Some little puzzle I'm up against, you can bet your neck! But say, Mr. Schuyler, it's the chance of my young life! O'Malley promised not to do anything to cramp my style. He's slick as they make 'em, and maybe he's a little stuck on himself at that, but he's giving me a fair chance and I'm going to show him a thing or two."

He drove his fingers through the thick, red mane that was already standing upright above his broad forehead and bright blue Irish eyes. His words fairly tumbled over each other.

"Geel! Think of my getting hold of a case like this at my age. Ain't it great? I suppose it's because the captain's a friend

of my old boss, Mr. Gregory, Mr. Jimmie Stone's partner, you know. He's boosted me from the start off, and I've just got to make good! But here I am running on, hell-bent-for election, and you broiling!"

He turned as he spoke and moved down the long room to the windows, leaving Dick within easy reaching distance of the coveted insole which lay for the moment, unprotected on the table. Could Peter by any wild possibility suspect him? Was his unwonted garrulity a blind and this opportunity a trap?

If so, Dick was no such fool as to fall into it. There was no one else about, and Peter, to use his own expression, would undoubtedly "get him with the goods."

An inspiration seemed to come to Dick as Peter struggled with the heavy sash. He saw, as in a vision, the red fire, kept going night and day, in the great range in his own kitchen where he used to play on the rainy days of his lonely childhood.

It seemed to wink at him with an expression of friendly and helpful assurance. He made up his mind then and there, as to the ultimate destination of his incriminating foot-gear, and concentrated all his faculties on his other engrossing problem.

There was no suspicion apparent in Clancy's face as he came back down the room. His eyes were eager and excited, but he did not even glance at the table. He had asked for no explanation of Schuyler's reappearance. Perhaps he had forgotten—

"I was called back to town suddenly," Dick volunteered, "and thought I'd see if you were here. I can't help being awfully interested in this whole thing, but I won't take up your time if you're too busy. Have you found out anything you can tell a fellow?"

"Nope," said Peter; "not a thing, so far—that is, not anything that looks like the chair for anybody. The cook vamosed yesterday afternoon, and we haven't caught her yet, so we don't know how much she's in it.

"She's got a bad record all right, but, as O'Malley says, 'you never can tell.' She might be on to the whole show, and then again she might be a little violet, though I

must say she doesn't look it. Rutledge turned up all right, but we haven't got that Pendleton chap yet."

He did not mention it, but the fact was that all this information had been in the morning papers, as Dick well knew. Peter had the air of taking his influential friend as much as possible into his confidence.

"What's become of the other servants?" Dick asked in a matter-of-fact manner. "Are they still here?"

"The old lady went last night to stay with a friend," Clancy answered in a pre-occupied tone. His back was turned and he was copying something from the open directory.

A silence followed. Only a short one, it is true, but too long for Dick's taut nerves.

"And the young girl, Nora?" he asked, trying to keep the anxiety out of his voice.

Peter closed the book and turned toward him. "Oh, yes, the little housemaid," he answered absent-mindedly. "She went last night, too."

Dick could scarcely restrain his impatience. He must see Nora at once; but how was he to find out where she was without exciting suspicion? Dare he venture another question? Peter seemed to be pre-occupied. Anyhow, Dick was desperate. He must risk it.

"Pretty little thing, wasn't she?" he hazarded casually. "I suppose you didn't get anything more out of her before she left?" The upward inflection demanded an answer.

Peter roused himself. "Her?" he said. "Oh, no; nothing of any importance. You

don't know anything about her, do you, Mr. Schuyler?"

"What do you take me for, Peter?" said Dick sharply. "What should I know about a maid servant?"

"Aw, I didn't mean any offense, Mr. Schuyler. You ought to know that," said Peter, laughing. "But she was a pippin, all right, and you wouldn't be the only swell she knew, at that."

"What do you mean, Peter?" asked Dick, showing what he considered a warrantable amount of interest.

"Why, you heard yourself that she had known Mrs. Rutledge before, and now here's something funny. She's given a forwarding address, care of Vincent Quartley, son of old Tremont Quartley, the millionaire. Can you beat that? Some class to her friends, eh, what?"

Richard expressed his astonishment. "And you don't know where she's gone further than that?" he asked in conclusion.

Perhaps Clancy felt that his youth and a sympathetic audience had betrayed him into saying too much.

"Oh, there's nothing specially against her," he replied, non-committally. "I guess she's all right. Now I've got to beat it, Mr. Schuyler, if you don't mind."

Dick didn't mind in the least. He had found out all that he could hope to for the present, and the atmosphere of the house seemed surcharged with menace. It had taken all his courage to remain when he remembered the full implication of the contents of his bag, and he felt a great relief when he had bidden Peter good-by from his own door-step.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

U U U U

MARCH WIND

BY BEE JAY

WITH swoop and swirl and twirl of girl,
It catches the breath at the corner.
As the mad March hair whips the face of the fair
Than the blind there's none forlorn.

The Best Laid Plans



by Ed Cahn

MILT GELBERSTEIN felt that the world was his oyster and he had been thinking for some time that as long as he remained city salesman for a small concern like Papernick & Sugarman he would never get it pried open.

He had just explained to them that he wanted more salary and they had refused it, so, as he settled his hat jauntily over his ambitious young face and sallied forth from the Copperguild building where his own and several small concerns occupied manufacturing lofts, he made up his mind that he would quit fooling and go into business for himself.

He went to Kaplan's Kosher Restaurant, rendezvous for most of the people he knew in that particular nook of the jewelry manufacturing world, and headed for his favorite corner. He was glad that he had already investigated the resources and qualifications of everybody in the least likely to be of use to him and that he did not have to waste a minute on that now. All he had to do was break the news to the fortunate pair he had selected for the honor of boosting him up the financial ladder; find a suitable location and wade right in.

As he sat down his friend Louie Willinsky came in and took the chair opposite him—a very good omen, Milt felt, for though Louie might be as ugly as a mud pie and as unkempt as a bag of rags, he was also one of the best working jewelers and

factory men in the trade; had a little money and the man of men to put a new manufacturing venture fairly on its technical feet.

"Vell," said Louie, "sour like a lemon you look in the face. Have you got a pain or a grouch?"

"Aw, my firm gives me both! They get me sore—the cheap skates. They won't pay nothing, and yet no matter how much I do they're never satisfied. This morning I bring in a big order from a concern rated AA1 but if you think they appreciate it, Louie, you don't know them kikes."

"Vat do you expect from a boss besides vages—a testimony of e-steam every five minutes? If you got to have 'preciation vy 'preciate yourself. Everybody vat voiks has got the same holler, Milt, so it ain't so new that you should spoil my lunch vit it.

"Look at Léontine Dreyfus, that Frencher goil vat voiks in the shop vit me. A fine diamon' setter she is, Milt, but also in Paris she loins designing. To make a hit vit the boss she draws some svell ideas for bar pins and he makes them up. Vat's the result? Vell, they sell big and he makes money on them but Léontine she gets nodding—not even a kind void, because Feldman he is so scared that she finds out she got brains that he treats her like doit for fear she asks him for more money and she has to fight like a wild-kat to get even a dollar a veek extra."

"That proves what I'm all the time telling you, Louie. We are looney to work for anybody but ourselves. Now here's you, a swell factory man, and here's me, a wonderful salesman with not only a great personality but an enormous trade. Why don't we go to work and join together in a partnership, hire a loft somewhere, be our own boss and make some money for ourselves instead of making it for other people?"

"I got some wonderful ideas for novelty stuff that you could make up and with me to sell them they'd go big! Say, honest, no kidding now, Louie, whatdya say me and you go in together?"

"Vy because, Milt? Simply I ain't got no *mazuma* to t'row at no boids. I'm satisfied to keep my few hundred dollars in the bank and draw down regular my seexty-five a week and let the odder feller be the boss and worry about the rent. Here comes Herb Speyerboig—tell your schemes to him and lemme eat my *blinzes* in peace."

Herb, a trifle breathless, sat down at their table. Louie looked at his neat good looks, faint malice in his sleepy eyes. "Say, Milt, you know that Frencher goil I was telling you about? Vell, Hoib is stuck like glue on her, ain't you Hoib?"

"Aw cut it out!" protested Herb, turning to give the waiter his economical order.

"Yes," continued Louie, "the goil t'inks because Hoib is a bookkeeper that he is a great *macher* and—"

"Cut it out, I tell ya! I get enough nonsense at the shop! The girl's *mashugga* in the head. I hadda run like a son-of-a-gun to keep her from coming to lunch with me. She put up a stall she has something she wants to show me."

"*Mazeltoiv*, Hoib, ven is the vedding?" teased Louie.

Milt yanked the subject from unprofitable woman back to business. "Lissen, Herb, me 'n Louie was just talkin; we're thinking of going partners pretty soon."

Herb examined his *schnitzel* with a suspicious eye and an exploring fork. "Well, Milt what's that to me?"

"Maybe it's nothing and maybe it's a whole earful; it depends on how much brain you got behind that bone dome of

yours, Hoib, and if you would put in a thousand dollars of your money. Lissen now; here's Louie with a few pennies saved up—maybe six hundred dollars." He paused and bent upon Louie an information-compelling look almost hypnotic in strength. "Would it be as much as that, Louie?"

Louie shrugged. "Am I on the vitness stand?"

"Seven hundred dollars, maybe seven hundred and fifty," deduced Milt, and Louie nodded almost imperceptibly.

"I myself have got twenty-two hundred cash. I can raise five hundred on this here three-stone diamond ring with here and there five hundred more because I got lots of friends. And if I went to the National Bank I bet I could get a good line of credit on my own personal note. So putting it all together and working like hell we oughta make good."

"First we would shop around and get us a little factory to start. You would run the books because there ain't a better office man anywhere in a cage than you. Louie would run the shop because he's already bugs on machines and knows all about 'em and I would be the brains and sell the goods."

"Take it from me, inside of two years instead of working for Berg, Cohen & Feldman you would have them sweating nights from worry over the business we would do them out of, and Papernick & Sugarman will be wishing they'da given me a raise when I asked them. Well, what do you say to the scheme?"

Louie declined to enthuse. "Vat for kind sickarettes do you smoke; Milt? You seem to be full of hop."

"It's a bet he never got this way on tobacco," agreed Herb.

"The trouble with you guys," said Milt pityingly, "is that you are a coupla clock punchers afraid to take a chance. You got to have somebody over you to say Giddap before you do anything and if anybody would yell Whoa you would stop dead. Why don't you copy after me and get ambitions?"

"Ambitions ain't vat you need, Milt, it's a press-agent."

Then Milt shoved aside the dishes and went after them hammer and tongs and kept at them until they showed signs of interest. At that point, being a wily young man and well versed in Hebrew psychology, he appeared to rather regret having made the proposition to such a pair of unambitious, impecunious nincompoops and dropped them and the whole subject as he pushed back his chair with an impatient scrape.

"S'long, boys. I got something important to tend to. Give them time-clocks a punch for me, will ya?" He struck a match on the back of Herb's chair and strolled out.

Walking back toward the Copperguild building, he felt rather pleased with progress so far. "I sure got them going. They'll come in with me," he reflected, "and I know now how much money Louie has got. But it's fierce none of us is a designer because if I got to hire one to tell my ideas to, it means a big expense."

This reminded him of Léontine, the French designer. He was sure Louie was secretly in love with her; an interesting circumstance but so far as he could see, neither here nor there. He wished, since she was so unusually clever that she had been a *han*, with some capital, so she could be taken into the firm. And just then, turning a corner, he almost ran into her. He noticed signs of anger in her intense little face as he greeted her, "Hello, Miss Dreyfus; what you got there?"

"Allo, Meester Gelberstein you'self: Zese are ze bootiful design I make especial to show 'Erb Speyerberg. Ze lavalier, ze bar pin and ze new idea for bracelet I myself invent." Her lips trembled. "But I not see heem."

"Don'tcha care, girly," soothed Milt, "here; lemme carry them. Come on in here and I'll buy you a cup of coffee and a big piece of *kase kuchen*."

"No, I not eat, I cannot! I so disappoint wiz my life I will die. And I not care. If I too slow about it I keel myself wiz a sharp knife or ze deep river!" But she suffered herself to be led into a basement bakery and ordered soup, two lamb chops, a salad, French pastry and coco.

It was going to cost more than sixty cents to be consoler, and as Milt added the check in his mind he reflected that grafting girls made him sore.

He unrolled the designs and immediately all was forgiven, for the ideas so exquisitely worked out in color there were beautiful beyond all praise.

"Some work, girly!"

But Léontine pushed the sheets aside. "Oh, I mus' talk my wo wiz some one! My heart she is broke in two. I lofe some-bozzy zat not lofe me!"

"That fool Herb," thought Milt and decided to give the fellow a talking to.

"He not care. Et ez nossing to heem zat I am clevailr; ze genius; no! He t'ink nossing of account but zis pretty face. Ah, *mon Dieu*, I die of ze heart-broke, I—"

She stopped and Milt, dreading tears, said the first thing that came into his mind. "What's this other girl like?"

"She is a lump of giggling dough; a yellow hair. She has ze mind of ze vacuum and ze job of ze monkey. I hate her gaze of ze impossible innocence."

"That's the blonde chicken with the baby stare in their shop," thought Milt. "Now I've got something to work on."

The rest of her plaint flowed on unheard for the designs he had just seen had made him certain that he must command her labors for the new concern. He might hire her, but that would cost money—besides how long would she stay? How simple if Herb married her! Then, as a well-conducted married woman, all she could expect for her services would be her board and clothes. He smiled to himself. The thing to do was to marry her to Herb, a simple matter once he got busy, though of course there remained a few details. Having absolutely no qualms about playing destiny, Milt turned his mighty brain into this new channel.

Essie, the blond chicken, complicated things a trifle but to offset her he had Louie—yes, the matter could be managed. He smiled reassuringly at Léontine, wondering why people called her plain. Of course she was French and dark and nature had been a trifle too emphatic when she applied the stamp of Israel to the small

features, but the mouth was nice, though a trifle wide, and surely the lashes around her bright eyes were long and silky. He liked her himself.

"Lissen, girly, dear, Herb's only been kidding you to make you jealous. He don't care for that Essie. So you cheer up and leave this here to me. I'll fix everything up for you."

Léontine looked surprised and then she beamed with delight. "Ah, Meester Gelberstein! wizzout you I die. You feex my affair and I lofe you ver' mooch!" She clasped his hand hard with her warm, firm fingers and Milt, who was a seasoned veteran in affairs of the heart, marveled at the thrill that shot up his arm, even as he wondered what had put that mischievous twinkle in her eye. "Lissen, now, girly, s'agreed you do just as I say?"

"Sure," she promised and drained the last drop of coco down her slender brown throat, regarding him meantime, as he was aware, through her downcast lashes.

"All right then, the first thing to do is to make Herb believe you've got no use for him. I don't know how it is in France, Miss Dreyfus, but in N'York anyway, the minute a guy gets the idea a girl's crazy about him he's cured. You made a mistake to let him know."

"Name of a name of a name! He not know, unless he dream it! I not tell heem. I only tell you! Because—I—I—despair! I dying and nossing matter. Oh, no, no, no!"

"Well he's got a hunch then. Now you better play up to somebody else pretty strong—me, or Louie; so's to kill that hunch. You make him jealous; see?"

"No can be accomplish," objected the lady. "'Erb, he too cleveair, too han'some not to know long time zat trick. He see it done in ze movies; he what you call too wise a mice to nibble zat cheese, no!"

"I gotcha," agreed Milt suddenly, at the end of his resources. Léontine smiled sagely. "Attend, Meester Gelberstein, my frien'. Ze way to do ez to disguz' zé woman wiz ze man desire' so zat she will herself give heem ze papers to walk. Zen I be on hand to do the console—you receive me?"

"Yes, I get you; great dope! Go right to it, girly. Say, can I have these sketches?"

"Certain-lee I draw many more—am I not ze arteest?"

Milt paid the check and they walked back to the Copperguild building.

At quitting time they met again; quite by accident. "Allo," she said; "back in ze crowd comes zat Louie and 'Erb; zerefore we loiter, no?"

A moment later, just as the others passed, she was clinging to his arm and laughing coquettishly up at him for their benefit. Milt noticed that Herb grinned indifferently but that Louie looked far from pleased. "Behol'!" she chuckled. "I t'row a stone at one rooster and I hit anozzer but ze nex' time I hit ze eye of ze bull."

"You've got the idea," Milt applauded "but smile a little at Louie, too." He felt that if she were overconfident about Herb it would be well for his plans if Louie were handily emeshed somewhere in the net.

Léontine nodded and a moment later the subway swallowed her up.

Milt talked partnership to Herb for an hour that evening and got him so enthused over the picture of wealth which he painted that he practically pledged himself to go in to the extent of his services and a thousand dollars of the money his frugality had piled up for just such a need.

Louie was a harder nut to crack. "A partnership again!" he cried when Milt had rooted him out of his lodging and backed him into a corner. "*Vos haksto a chinik?* Cheesy dreams! I'm settisfied, so vy should I let you gif me a restlessness?"

"For your own good, you poor, simple boob! Honestly I wonder why I bother myself with a damn fool guy like you with no brains and no sense, when I know easy a hundred people that would jump at a chance to go in with me. This is the thanks I get for being a friend of yours and taking a interest in you."

"Yow!" retorted Louie. "It's my bank-book you take the interest in. Go tell your schemes to some vun vich wouldn't know you like I know you and gimme a little *manucha*."

"All right, if it's peace you want why don't you go die?" There's lots of peace in the grave and it's the only place for dead ones. But you wait until you see the swell factory me and Herb will get!"

"Vait? Vat else am I doing but vaiting? You should kvit talking so much like a mining-stock letter, Milt, and show me somet'ink; then maybe I might lissen vunct."

And with that Milt had to be content. For a week he spent every spare moment searching for a suitable place to begin—except the frequent moments in which he consulted with Léontine about her affairs.

He found it harder and harder to maintain his brotherly tone with her, for it began to look as if Léontine had transferred her fickle fancy from Herb to himself; and while it might be flattering it was embarrassing. It is difficult to be brotherly with one seemingly bent upon abandoning the sisterly at the first opportunity, and Milt found himself forced more and more to general topics in their conversations.

It was at one of these times that he let fall the information that he was thinking of going into business for himself and that he was on the lookout for a factory. "A good location; lots of light and ready to start up. My ideas, Miss Dreyfus, are too valuable to hang around and wait for new machinery to get going."

Léontine's admiring gaze seemed to say that while her tongue might babble of business her eyes just would not behave. "Ah, ze cle vair one! He perceive zere ez no nourishment in ze job for anozzer. Ah, I lofe ze man of ze g-r-reat ambish! I—"

"How are you making out with Herb?" interposed Milt in haste. "Didn't I see Essie with red eyes last night and somebody about your size walking through Maiden Lane with Herb?"

Léontine shrugged and regarded him with an inscrutable smile. "Zat Essie she cry because ze boss he fire her out. He ez one fat monstair, no?"

Milt felt pretty certain from her contented expression that a certain small French monster might have had something important to do with the elimination of the pretty Essie, but she went on:

"Zat Louie Willinsky he ez ver' nize man. I like heem mooch. I will train heem to wear ze collair of civilization an' zen—maybe—"

"Like fun!" thought Milt. "I'm wise to her she thinks by saying that she can make me believe she ain't after me. Too bad it's hopeless but it shows the girl's got ambition and there's nothing to censor in her taste."

But as the days passed he began to think that he was mistaken. Léontine's regard for the flattered Louie seemed to grow. They went to and fro to lunch and Louie had been seen taking her into a movie. Herb, cleverly played upon by Milt, seemed to regret that the prize had slipped from his grasp and he began to try to win it back again, Léontine impishly encouraging one day and the next passionately loyal to Louie, who by now was so far gone as to have bought a nail file which he carried in his vest pocket and used whenever he felt sentimental.

To Milt, Léontine was absolutely frank. "I will—how you say?—I will get heem yet."

"Which one?"

"Oh, la la, ze right one of course."

The rivals developed a fearful animosity toward each other and were none too cordial with Milt, for they could see no real need for the confidential talks he had with Léontine and looked upon him as a rival, too. "Don't talk to me about no factory," growled Herb. "Say, I wouldn't go in partners with a kike like Willinsky, not if I was paid for it." Louie expressed himself in the same strain regarding Herb and Milt began to see that his medicine was too strong and to lose sleep trying to think up an antidote sufficiently subtle to prevent the ruination of the budding partnership.

He urged a decision upon Léontine representing that it was cruel of her to keep such fine fellows any longer in the agony of suspense. "It wouldn't be so bad, Miss Dreyfus, if you weren't all working in the same place together, but as it is them two boys could eat the ears off each other any minute."

But the lady tossed her head. "Ah, but

zey are what you call ze fools for ze punish. An' zere ez no hurry; I take ze time; I ver' young yet. Maybe I not marry wiz zem at all—maybe I marry wiz somebozzy else!" She laughed and hitched her chair closer to his.

"Behold"! always I t'ink of you my frien'. Here in ze *Jeweler's Circular* ez ze advertisement of ze little factory you sigh for. Et ez ze situation ideal!"

Milt thought so too and left her to finish her lunch alone while he hustled to investigate. He found the agent, a small real-estate operator, a most voluble and obliging person who assured him in broken English that here was the chance of a lifetime.

Milt agreed though not audibly. "Well, Mr. André, I seen another place I like better but I will anyway tell my partners about this and let you know."

Mr. André bowed politely, his expression proclaiming that it was a matter of supreme indifference to him, so many clients did his list contain.

Milt got hold of Louie and Herb at the first opportunity. No, they would not be in a partnership together, though Louie would go in with Milt if Herb stayed out and Herb would if Louie didn't.

"But you darned mewels! Neither one of you jackasses has enough money to do the thing alone! Say, if ya'll only quit fighting there is a chance here for all of us but if you don't then we're all killed."

"Vell," demanded Louie, "suppose I make up mind I don't care vat kind company I keep and I go in vit you, am I the boss den?"

Herb stuck out his chin most aggressively. "The guy that runs the books and the office end is the boss and that's me!"

"Say," cut in Milt sarcastically, "who is getting up this concern, you or me? Am I putting up the most money besides doing all the brain work, or ain't I?"

"Aw, you think you are poifec!" sneered Louie, "but vat you vant to be is not only the team but the driver too."

"Don't talk like a child! 'Snuff that you act like one. We won't have no boss; we'll talk everything over together nice and quiet and majority will rule."

"I'll be majority," promised Louie, "Vell, let's go look at this vunderful factory."

Herb agreed, pointing out that he was not to be considered as committed by any means.

They started, Milt walking between to keep the peace.

Then Herb raised the question of how much each was to draw out of the business per week and they were still acrimoniously discussing that vital matter when they arrived.

As Léontine had said, the place was ideal. The former owner had died and as his estate was being wound up, it could be had surprisingly cheap. Herb, well impressed, talked figures with the agent, who was waiting for them, and Louie poked his nose around the machines.

He soon drew Milt aside. "It's a good proposition, Milt. The machines alone without no tools or fixtures is worth the money. I would go in vit you but I don't trust Hoib. If he is a trifier vit nice goils like Miss Dreyfus he is also not a-scared to trifle vit my money."

Milt laughed. "An excuse! Stay out if you wanta, Louie. Herb and I can get another partner. But say, I'll tell you something. Miss Dreyfus she told me herself she was only fooling Herb; that she likes you the best."

The approach of the others dismissed Léontine and affairs of the heart.

Mr. André begged to be excused long enough to get some cigars and as soon as he was gone the boys held a consultation.

"Are you coming in on this with me or are you staying out?" demanded Milt finally. "This is the place for me and I'm going to nab it."

"I'm in," answered Herb promptly and Louie chimed in a second later to the same effect.

"All right. We'll tell André he wants too much for it and offer him fourteen hundred and fifty dollars—might's well pare down to the bone to start with."

They did, just as soon as he had returned and passed his cigars around. He said it was "Impos—seeble!" and the battle was on. Result, at the end of the

discussion which was thoroughly enjoyed by all parties; a deadlock half way between notches.

"Well," decided Herb, the financial man, "we quit here. This is our last and best offer. Find out what the executors say and leave us know. Come on, boys, this ain't the only factory."

"Vat for kind of a foreign boid is this André?" Louie wanted to know as they left him behind.

"Dago or maybe Bohunk," answered Milt. "Ain't I got enough on my mind, Louie, without you bothering me over things that's nothing to me in the first place?"

Matters remained as they were for two days and then one sunny noon hour, Herb and Léontine told Milt that everything was arranged between them and the engagement to be announced at a party to be given for her by her aunt.

Milt tried to believe that a sudden sinking feeling was due to his fear of fresh complications when Louie heard the news, but he knew it was really because he hated to see a girl like Léontine wasted on selfish Herb who only wanted her so as to prevent Louie's getting her.

He congratulated them and then went on rather hurriedly to suggest that the news be kept from Louie until the night of the party. Herb was all for breaking his rival's loving heart at once but Léontine readily agreed.

"I say nossing to nobozzy. Who could tell? Maybe I even change my mind to somebozzy else!" She laughed and clutched Milt's arm with another of her thrilling grasps before she ran away and left them.

Milt saw that it behooved him to work fast and he did. He convinced Herb that it would never do to allow such a capable factory man as Louie to get away from them merely on account of a girl. "We'll cinch him to-night, Herb, before he has a chance to get mad and kick over the goulash on us. That agent has just let me know we can have the place at our figure. It's dirt cheap. He has the bill of sale all made out and waiting for a deposit."

"All right. Milt, you have Louie at Cohen & Wasser's law office at seven to-night, and we will sign up before he wiggles out on us."

Needless to say, Milt had Louie at the law office on time. By seven thirty it had been agreed, all in legal form, that Louie was to be boss of the factory; Herb of the books and office, while Milt was to attend to the selling end. Each was to draw thirty-five dollars a week for the first year and then if the business warranted it, a larger sum to be decided later. The firm was to be known as Gelberstein, Willinsky & Speyerberg, manufacturers of gold and novelty jewelry.

Milt dried the ink on the signatures himself, a wide, happy smile on his face. He had put it over. He was in business for himself for the first time in his young life and Léontine, with her designing genius was as good as married into the firm.

"Now, boys," he said, "we better beat it right up to André's office and get the bill of sale. I told him we would be there at eight o'clock sharp."

Again Mr. André was waiting for them. The fatal business was transacted in a few minutes and they wished each other well in the new venture. Mr. André added his good wishes as he pulled out his watch. "Don't be in a hurry, gentlemen. I expect a lady you all know."

As he spoke the door opened and Léontine came in. "Allo," she greeted airily and thrust out her hand to André. "Ze affair ez settle? Good! Now I will pleece have half ze comish for because I bring you ze customair!"

"On ze instan' I cash zis check, *made-moiselle*."

"Sanks. For one million sings I mus' buy wiz heem."

"Hey," protested Herb, much displeased, especially at the brilliant smile with which she favored Louie. "You never told me you was in on this."

"Many sings I not tell."

"Huh! I don't like you to have secrets away from me—see? Or splitting commissions with men. And you can't have that money to blow in."

"An' w'y not?"

"Because I say so! If you're engaged to me, you do as I say and I say that money goes to this firm!"

"Shut up!" hissed Milt and Louie laughed.

Léontine stood on tip-toe 'till the better to snap her fingers under Herb's nose. "Zat for you! Zis for ze engage! I untie myself loose from you—cross one! Over zere ez ze door and farther on ze street—adieu!"

Herb nearly strangled with the surprised words that rose but she rushed to the door and held it open. "*En route!* Go, depart! I tie on you ze can!" And Herb with one furious look departed—his manner that of a man whose bluff is called.

"Pardon me," requested their host and he, too, disappeared.

Here, for Milt's astonished inspection, was a pretty kettle of fish and Gelberstein, Willinsky & Speyerberg all of a sudden with no more designer than a rabbit. He hastened panic-stricken to the rescue of his plans.

"Well, Louie," he said with feigned easiness, "maybe you will believe me now. Didn't I tell you Miss Dreyfus was gointa ditch Herb the first chance she got?"

The practical jeweler advanced with a smile still wider than Léontine's. "Cheer up, deary, sooner than see you left in the loich I would marry you myself even if you was engaged vit Hoib and never told me."

"No, sank you. I t'ink I marry wiz nobozzy." She glanced sidelong at Milt who felt the ground slipping from beneath his feet. The minx had been after him all the time!

"I not like zis country—I go back to Paris, if—"

Worse and more of it! She would leave America unless he surrendered. Well, maybe he might have to but not without a last fight for life and freedom. He dragged forward the chagrined and blushing Louie. "Aw, Léontine, have a heart! Louie is a nice guy and he loves you like mad."

"That's vat I do," pleaded Louie.

But she sat down on a corner of Mr. André's desk and waved her hand in dismissal. "I sugges' Mr. Willinsky go to his colleague outdoors."

"You and Herb wait for me," commanded Milt, "I'm coming right away."

After Louie, too stunned for words, had gone, Léontine smiled her inscrutable smile, but Milt, though trapped, lost, beaten and stung, still had spirit enough left to hedge. "Say, little one, you're too hard on Herb."

"Talk no insects to me, no!"

"Of course Louie is a dub but—"

"He not!" she flamed. "He nize. I like. He have good heart. In a collar of sense and a hair-cut of style he would not be ze objec' of derision but somesing to love. But I not care. I will have somesing else! Ah you blin', blin' man! Why you not—" Her voice broke.

"Aw, all right!" surrendered Milt at last, intoxicated like many another wretch before him by a loving woman's adoration, "I'll marry you!"

But Léontine burst into a peal of laughter and evaded his not reluctant arms. "Oh, la la la! Ze droll enfant! I not want marry! Certain-lee of course, no! I desire be only ze designer and head setter for you! I like ze job—and ze more mon! I not like Berg, Cohen & Feldman, because I do sings extra for zem and zey not got ze gratefulness."

"Holy herrings!" cried Milt, "is that all? Why didn't you say that in the first place?"

"I t'ink better I demonstrate firs' how clevail I am. Zat was ze why I show you zose designs—for I hear long time maybe you go in beezness for yourself. When I know sure, I have my aunt's frien' find ze factory—and I get half ze comish because I need ze mon. I arrange wiz André to come for it, so you perceive I know somesing besides set the stones and also to ask for ze posish. Do I get heem?"

Milt was so relieved to find that matrimony was not to be thrust upon him that he would have promised her the stars.

"Sure you do! But I don't get you about Herb and Louie. If you don't want to get married why—"

"Many reasons for zem, my frien'. Firs' I ver' mad at my fiancé in Paris so I flirt wiz 'Erb. I forget keep my finger cross and I love heem a leedle. Zen I not."

Still I trifle so if you not want me design for you he will insis'. Wiz Louie, zat donkey, ze same reason and because, *mon Dieu*, a woman she mus' have some amuse."

Milt passed a hand over his dazed head. Girls were surely very queer people. "Lemme call in Herb and Louie, will ya?" "Certain-lee."

The rejected ones waited outside on the curb, smoking gloomily, not sure whether condolences or congratulations on their escapes were in order but determined, now that they had compared notes, to make things hot for the senior partner. They pounced upon him the instant he appeared but he managed to hold them off until he got them before Léontine.

She held out both hands to them. "Boys, I make ze apologize. I just what you call fooling wiz you. I not love—not ver' mooch—not enough for ze marry. But I like be designer and head setter for your

firm and Mr. Gelberstein he say yes if everysing all right wiz you."

Milt suddenly realized that he had promised her unconditionally and he admired her pacifying tact as much as the coaxing smile with which she leveled their defenses.

They looked sheepishly at each other and grinned. "Enough!" cried Léontine, "I am forgave! The hatchet she is buried! I have ze job!"

There was some further talk, mostly about her salary, and then Louie said, "Say, Léontine, no fooling, you oughta be married to one of us so nobody could get you away from the foim."

"Oh, la la!" she laughed looking deep into his eyes while she slipped one of her little hands into Herb's and the other into Milt's. "Perhaps you right. I t'ink maybe you ez. So I observe who treats me ze bes' and maybe some time I get married even yet."

SONG OF AHMED

BY MARY L. BRAY

O LOVE, thy kiss!
The petals of a bud unfurled
Into a perfect rose that curled
Against my lips.

O Love, thy hand!
The white moon beckoned to the tide;
It heaved and crept o'er oceans wide
Upon the sand,

Thy voice—thy words!
The soft wind breathed upon the trees,
And straightway sprang the little leaves
And sang the birds.

Thy silken hair!
Night dropped her curtains from afar,
And pinned them close with every star
To veil her there.

O Love, thine eyes!
A fiery planet burst apart,
And every burning, whirling dart
Has lighted Paradise.

The House With a Bad Name

by Perley Poore Sheehan

Author of "Upstairs," "If You Believe It, It's So," "God's Messenger," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

QUITE by chance, Buckhannon, the architect, and Hal, an artist, came on the lovely old house at No. 6 Cinnamon Street, in lower New York. The detached interest of art was immediately changed into personal curiosity, when the two observers beheld the old butler, Mr. Partridge, emerge from the front door, followed by a stately old gentleman in gray, with a fair young girl of twenty on his arm. She was dressed in white silk and old lace, with many ruffles in the style of the eighteenth century. Partridge put them into an old victoria, driven by a decrepitated coachman named Goodenough.

After the carriage passed out of sight the men sauntered into a drug-store across the way, and over their sodas tried to pick up from the shambling druggist the history of the house and its tenants. But all they learned was that the house had an unsavory reputation, and that its present master, Mr. Nathan Tyrone, was held in disrepute because of the conflicting stories about his father's death, and the young woman, who, after twenty years, had returned, untouched by time. Some said the second wife had mysteriously replaced a first.

Buckhannon, who had seen the lovely, radiant vision, and for a moment held her eye, lingered about the neighborhood, but by Goodenough and Hickcock, a policeman, he had the druggist's hints confirmed but not clarified.

One evening Partridge admitted a visitor, certain heavy luggage having passed through the same door earlier in the day. Judge Bancroft had answered the summons of Nathan Tyrone, whose father had been his intimate friend. He explained his request to the judge by telling him he desired some understanding of his present finances, because he was about to return to Europe with his daughter to revisit the scenes of his travels with her mother. He referred to his estrangement with his father, who died without having seen him. Nathan Tyrone had married Mlle. Melissine de la Valliere, a French opera singer, and his father had refused to receive her because young Nathan had already compromised himself in his father's eyes by bringing home and keeping there, with the assistance of Partridge, a bedraggled child of the streets whom he had found with painted lips and meager finery in a snow-drift. He had acted from the high and impersonal motives of a poet, with a poet's passionate disregard for appearances, but Mr. Nathan did not go further into his history with the judge. He merely touched on the pain which had paralyzed him when his beautiful wife, the very image of the wonderful La Tour portrait which hung over the fine old fireplace, in the room in which they sat, had died in giving birth to his child. And how he had refused to even see her until dear, old, faithful Partridge had come over and arranged a chance encounter. Since then he had never left the girl out of his sight. Now they were about to sail for France, and he wanted to arrange all matters pertaining to her inheritance.

Then Partridge threw open the door, and Miss Tyrone entered.

Tyrone had been settled in Paris with his daughter, when one day in the Luxembourg gardens, while the old man sat dreaming on a parapet, some distance away, Eugene Buckhannon came upon Melissine.

Another day he waited for them, and when they entered Notre Dame he followed, and took his place alongside the kneeling girl. There, under the domed roof of the old church, before the altar, hand in hand, they called each other by their Christian names, and whispered the secret which filled each heart.

Nathan Tyrone, returned from his own meditations, inspired by the music and a passing funeral procession, to discover the two young people. Then he realized for the first time how his own life lay in the past, and how this beautiful daughter of his was being swept on by the never ceasing tide of human events, and how the budding promise of her dear, young life was overshadowed by the unsavory repute which clung to their old home in Cinnamon Street.

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for February 28.

CHAPTER XXII.

"O BLESSED LIGHT!"

SOMETHING of all this—of the joy of life, and of the hope that springs eternal, and of the glory everlasting—was reflected in No. 6 Cinnamon Street.

The autumn deepened. The trees in the chapel yard next door shed their leaves—just as the trees in the Luxembourg Gardens shed theirs. The first cold winds and drizzles were succeeded both in Paris and New York by the melancholy glow of an Indian summer. Winter came. But the love story that made Paris indifferent to the seasons also had its counterpart in old No. 6.

Since the Tyrones went away Mr. Partridge had continued to live there alone—as much as any old man is ever alone. And the butler was rather the type to find society in ghosts than even most old men are inclined to do.

He had the family portraits to keep him company. Keep him company they did. They had their eyes upon him as he tottered about the darkened house at his various occupations. He had plenty to do. He was keeping the house in perfect order.

And Mélissine was there. First of all, she smiled at him every time he came into the music-room—smiled at him from her balcony over the fireplace, demure and sympathetic, infused with a latent fire. Often at night old Partridge would light the candles that illuminated La Tour's portrait and light no others. Then Partridge would bring down from up-stairs a flute of his own—a flute he had learned to play in the days of his youth in imitation of his earlier master. And Partridge would play tune after tune to the great delight of the lady hanging on the wall. He would play the old tunes: "How Can I Leave Thee?" "Nancy Lee," "Old Black Joe," "Silver Threads Among the Gold," "Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes."

And after this concert for two he would elaborately blow his nose and touch his eyes and do a little reverence to the dear dead Mlle. de la Vallière of the eighteenth century. Then one by one he would extinguish the tapers and retire for the night.

A man of fine sentiment—of very fine sentiment. A young tree is beautiful, but an old tree is more beautiful yet when it continues to bloom.

But most of all was Mélissine present in spirit when old Partridge consulted that calendar she had given him.

"Let's see! This is the twenty-sixth!"

And he would adjust his glasses and turn his head at the proper angle for reading, all this with a pleasurable quaver of anticipation. And he would find something like this:

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

This always did good to Partridge.

He had a way of saying to himself: "Old men need such food as that. It is strengthening."

And he would meditate the meaning of the text all day, and continue to draw nourishment from it, ever with an underglow of gratitude for Mélissine. He would often say to himself: "It is good to have young people in the world."

Every time he thought of Mélissine it was as if he heard a transcript—with words and music—of that old hymn that had brought dawn out of darkness to Nathan Tyrone as he knelt there in Notre Dame:

"O Lux Beata—O Blessed Light!"

He clung to this light because he knew as well as any one could have known that there were days of darkness ahead when some such light would be necessary, else the whole world should go down in gloom. Old men know such things better than any one else—old men and old women; and old Partridge was something of both, he had seen so much, reflected so much. Moreover, he had all the delicacy of a woman, both inside and out, as he thought and thought and went about his housework.

But the house continued to be merely the house with a bad name for those who looked at it from the outside. It was a ghostly old place in the haunted Indian summer when the dead leaves were gusting about the tombstones next door. There were times when the trees seemed to talk to each other—first one of them sending down

a drift of leaves, then another one sending down a drift of leaves as if in answer. And it was always very silent in Cinnamon Street when these interchanges took place.

Old Goodenough continued to come and go.

Hickcock found Goodenough staring through the pickets of the chapel yard one night. "And why do you stare like that, Goodenough?" the policeman inquired.

Goodenough turned and contemplated his friend for a long time and made no answer except for the answer that might have been read in the haggard gloom of his vinous old face.

"Were you ever in love?" inquired Goodenough in turn. "I ask you, Hickcock, did you ever know the love of woman?"

Said Hickcock: "Me and my old woman have been married now for forty years."

"Answer my question," said Goodenough.

"I did."

"Tut! Tut!" said Goodenough. "Love is a hunger. Men don't love what they've got but what they've not."

"You dirty old rascal!" said Hickcock playfully. "Well, neither of us are as young as we used to be." He had a second thought. "At that, though," he said. "there's many a dame who would fall for me uniform. Ask any cop. What was you startin' out to say?"

"Once I was handsome," Goodenough replied gently. "This nose wasn't always swelled up and blue. Once I had all my teeth. You wouldn't believe it, to look at this cheek—all wrinkled and stubbly gray—that a woman should have touched it softly with her finger-tips."

"Sure I would," said Hickcock. "I've seen many an old rummy—and I'm not knocking you—and him not in uniform, neither—cut out a good one. You know the old sayin': 'The uglier the tike the harder they fall.' Go on with your story."

"And now she is dead," Goodenough pursued, without heeding the interruption; "and the best part of me is dead—as with all old men—who die like old trees, branch by branch, hope by hope."

"What happened to her?" Hickcock demanded.

He never could keep up with Goodenough's talk. Besides, Hickcock was the old policeman, with a talent for facts rather than for philosophy. His face was impassive. There was no other expression in his round eyes than that of blind inquiry. But he suited the poetic Goodenough. For to Goodenough, talking to Hickcock was as satisfactory as talking to himself or talking to the night.

"And it seemed to me," Goodenough pursued, "as if I had already been laid away in my grave in there, and that I was sort of dreaming, and that she came over and looked down at me, and began to talk with her low, soft voice. Did you ever read the tale of Clerk Saunders? That was what she said. Listen:

"Is there any room at your head, Saunders.
Is there any room at your feet?
Or any room at your side, Saunders,
Where fain, fain I wad sleep?"

Hickcock, in the meantime, had framed another question. He got this out:

"And where was it that you saw her last?"

Goodenough, with a look of mysticism on his dilapidated but expressive old face, gave Hickcock a lingering glance.

"'Twas in No. 6," he said.

He slowly turned and looked at the house with a bad name. He looked without anger, without much grief. Goodenough was the real poet. There was sorrow in the world, and there was joy. And both of them were beautiful.

Hickcock also was looking at No. 6—staring at it.

"See the dim light in it," he said.

The dim light was there. It might have meant almost anything. There is always a mystery about a light burning dimly in a house late at night. Some one revels. Some one works at something that may change the face of the world. But as often as not, if the truth be known, some one is up there calling on the Lord for help—a habit that has never grown old fashioned since the world began.

Partridge was there in the upper chamber that he called his own. It was a small.

chaste room, very humble, but perfectly kept. It was lit by a single candle. Mélissine's calendar hung on the wall. His flute lay on the top of the simple dresser. And Partridge, still fully dressed, and quite the picture of the old gentleman despite the fact that he was nothing but a butler, had knelt at the side of his narrow bed.

"Grant that neither of them find it out, O Lord!" he labored. "Move her heart, O Lord, to make it pure and gentle!"

Mélissine's heart was already pure and gentle. It couldn't have been concerning her that Partridge prayed.

And this brings us to the subject of the Woman in Black.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A PAGE OF ROMANCE.

SOONER or later, the Woman in Black was bound to appear. It didn't matter where she might be now. Her return was as certain as the return of Halley's Comet. The other residents of Cinnamon Street all knew this—knew it almost subconsciously. They took it as a matter of course. Even those among them who were not astronomers, so to speak, and knew nothing about charting the paths of comets, looked for the advent of the Woman in Black.

Some of them believed that she was already a dweller in No. 6. The Zambonis believed that she might be there. Else why should Partridge play those old love songs so late into the night? Why should he keep his light burning when folks should be in bed? And what was he talking aloud for—also late at night—if he were all alone? Small sounds traveled far in Cinnamon Street.

There were children in Cinnamon Street who believed that the Woman in Black was there. The children had a way of taking the other side of the street when they passed this way. As often as not they would stand for a while and look across at No. 6 in perfect silence. This because of something they had heard their parents say. No. 6 was haunted. It was haunted by a Woman in Black.

The real astronomers, though, were the druggist, the coachman, and the policeman. It wasn't just superstition with them. They went on facts.

The facts were these:

A great many years ago—it was while the father of Nathan Tyrone was still alive—Nathan Tyrone was seen to return to his house one night with a woman. This woman was supposed to have been young and handsome, although no one had seen her face—no one, that is, outside of No. 6. Thus the woman had entered No. 6. She had been veiled. She had been dressed in black. She had been further obscured by the darkness of the night.

Perhaps she had been no woman at all. Perhaps she had been something else—one of those things that the weird stories of the Old World tell about—one of those things that look like women but are not women at all. Every one has heard about them. The sages and the epics and also the folklore of all the races are filled with references to such creatures. They must exist.

Anyway, she had come to be known as the Woman in Black.

The father of Nathan Tyrone had been a proud old gentleman—very severe and very correct. Every day, when it was fine, he had gone for his dignified walk. Every Sunday morning, Goodenough had appeared on the box of the one best victoria remaining to Pliny's—the livery-stable down the street—and his fat sorrel groomed to a polish—and had driven the old gentleman to church.

Young Nathan had never gone to church—except imaginatively, so to speak—to the chapel next door. He had always been the romantic type, something of the poet, something of the painter. He used to sketch a lot in the little old graveyard, setting up his easel among the gray and moss-grown tombstones, and paying no attention at all to those who might stare at him through the tall and rusty old iron fence. And now and then they would see him going into or coming out of the abandoned chapel. The chapel, it seemed, and also the graveyard, had reverted to the Tyrone estate through the working of some old Colonial deed or other.

Anyway, there was something strange and ghostly about it—this intrusion of a Woman in Black, considering the father and considering the son.

You would have thought that the father would have been ashamed to show himself so superior and dignified, and to go to church like that, all the time that his house had a dweller in it that no decent person could mention except in a whisper. You would have thought that the son might have sought some other way to conceal his real business in life than by painting pictures in an abandoned graveyard and mooning about an abandoned chapel.

What had happened to her? What had become of her? Was she still there?

That was something else that was strange. No one knew.

Once they had brought a coffin out of the house. They had buried the coffin in the old graveyard. But who or what had the coffin contained? Had they buried the old man in it? Or had they buried the Woman in Black? Who could tell? Both had disappeared. Or was the coffin and the supposed funeral, after all, but a bit of black magic? As a matter of fact, the son—Nathan Tyrone, that is—also had disappeared. But he had come back again.

But when he came back he looked like a man who had suffered the Lord knows what. He looked like a man who had fallen in love with a hag or a demoness, and had just escaped. He was like that unfortunate in the poem of Keats—he who kissed the fairy woman:

"I saw pale kings, and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
Who cried—'La belle dame sans merci
Hath thee in thrall.'"

It was Goodenough who pulled that. There were always those who maintained that Goodenough knew more than he would ever tell, even when he was in his cups, which was pretty often. There were those who said that it was Goodenough himself who had driven the cab that had brought young Tyrone and the Woman in Black to No. 6 in the middle of the night.

It may have been so.

But if it was, the only time that Good-

enough had ever referred to the thing in a definite way was that night when Hickcock, the policeman, found Goodenough staring into the graveyard and reciting his ghost poetry about the woman he had loved and lost.

There had always been that other person who was not suspected, this time, but known positively, to possess a fund of dark knowledge on all that concerned the Woman in Black. This was old Partridge, and Partridge never talked to any one outside of No. 6, except for a word here and there with Goodenough, or a word now and then with the Zambonis when he ventured forth to do his marketing.

For years and years old Partridge had continued to live in the house alone—alone so far as any one could see. But, as we have already noted, there was reason to believe that Partridge was not quite so much alone as he would have liked to have people to believe. There were his late hours. There was his flute music. There were his mysterious comings and goings—at longish, uncertain intervals—in Goodenough's victoria; and concerning these excursions neither would Goodenough have much to say.

And then, one day, the young Tyrone had appeared with a foreign woman, pale and fair.

There were those who said that she was the Woman in Black. There were those who said that she was yet another woman whom the young Tyrone had brought to No. 6 while his father was yet-permitting himself to be seen. But the mystery was deeper than ever. For now Nathan Tyrone himself was old, and yet the woman appeared no older by so much as an hour. If anything, she was younger.

Grant that this last comer was Mélissine, her lovely self. Grant that it had been her mother who had been here before—whom Tyrone had brought over from Paris.

None the less, the original Woman in Black did remain an unsolved mystery. And even had any one been there to hear old Partridge pray—"Grant that neither of them find it out! Move her heart—to make it pure and gentle!"—even so the mystery would have remained as deep.

But time is the great solvent of mystery.

The winter deepened. The snow came. The sounds of the great city were more muffled than ever. More than ever was Cinnamon Street sequestered. More than ever was No. 6 a container of mysterious life, frozen now, but whence weird flowers might blossom in the spring.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WEIRD BLOSSOMS.

THERE were weird blossoms enough already inside of No. 6—as the flowers may be supposed to exist already in the heart of the frost-bound rose-bush. It was a sort of haunted garden, so to speak, through which might walk the spectral Woman in Black.

Tyrone had come back with his daughter from Paris. Tyrone had fallen into a sort of lethargy. He who had always been so indifferent to the world was now more indifferent than ever—to the actual world, that is. And he who had always lived in a world of his own fashioning—ever since he was a young man painting pictures in the graveyard and attending spirit worship in the abandoned chapel—now lived altogether in such a world. It was a world all his own. It was a world that had but the vaguest *rapproch* with the world in general.

And this world was the garden wherein the weird blossoms grew. It was the world of his mind.

"Partridge!"

"Yes, sir; I am here, sir!"

The master of No. 6 was seated in his music-room—the room he favored most because of the portrait that hung over the fireplace. He was seated before the fireplace. He lounged there rather—limp and graceful. He wore his velvet coat and his flowing tie. His hair was long and wavily disheveled. The firelight rose and fell. At times this made of him a picture of shadowy depression. At times it made him a picture of Satanic life. Over the fireplace was the portrait of the eighteenth-century beauty La Tour had painted, but who looked so much like the living Mélissine and who

looked so much like the bride Tyrone had lost.

"I am here, sir," said Partridge softly. He approached his master's chair. There was a look of concern on Partridge's face that had become almost habitual here of late.

"Is it not almost Christmas, Partridge?"

"This is the nineteenth, sir."

Partridge kept track of dates. No day went past now but what he consulted Mélissine's calendar. The motto for this day had been: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." And a supplemental whisper had come to Partridge: "Be faithful unto the death of Mr. Tyrone, for Mr. Tyrone is not long for this earth."

"The nineteenth," said Tyrone. "I shall have to be looking to my charity."

"I have been sending the usual remittance, sir," Partridge said with an undoubted nervousness.

"How much was that?"

"Eighty dollars a month, sir."

Tyrone reflected.

"I think that I shall give her a year's allowance in advance."

"That would be a great deal of money, sir."

"The estate will bear it."

"Oh, yes, sir."

"And after I am dead—and Mélissine has everything—perhaps circumstances will arise that will prevent future payments."

Partridge clasped his hands. He unclasped them. He was standing where Tyrone could not see his face. He glanced up at the portrait above the fireplace. She smiled at him deliciously. Somehow this encouraged Partridge. It was as if he were taking her part against the Woman in Black.

"You will pardon me, sir, if I venture to make a suggestion."

"I know what it will be," droned Tyrone. "I know what you're going to say, Partridge. You're going to say that the creature has no claim upon me and that this continual gift of money will cause talk."

"Not quite that, sir."

"Yes, it is. I know your thought. And

I remember what you said when I brought that unfortunate home with me— How long ago was it? Forty years! Forty years ago, come Christmas! I found her drunk or drugged in the snow. Remember?"

"I remember, sir."

"Remember how you helped me to smuggle her into one of the vacant rooms up-stairs, and care for her there, and feed her, without my father knowing anything about it?"

"Oh, yes, sir! And how you took all the blame—when your father did find out."

"Blame! There was no blame! There was a misunderstanding! Men have been blamed for many things in this world that will win them the congratulations of the angels in the next. How long ago did she die?"

"It was fifteen years ago, sir."

"That's right. And we've been keeping up the payments to her daughter?"

"Yes, sir. It was as you directed."

"She must be quite a big girl now."

"She is a woman of thirty, sir."

But most of the time, it was the woman represented by the portrait that engrossed Tyrone's thought.

"It is odd," said Tyrone, softly, as he looked up at her, "that I should have clung to life as if it were sweet when only in death is there sweetness. Love is sweet. But love is nothing but the prelude to death."

"I dreamed last night that I was in a thick garden of poppies, and the poppies grew so lush and thick that they swooned of their own fragrance, and you were there, and so was I, and that was death. Oh, Partridge!"

"I am here, sir."

"Did you ever love a woman, Partridge?"

"I suppose you may say, sir"—and Partridge, nervous, had let his old eyes lift to the portrait over the mantelpiece—"that I did, sir."

"Was she beautiful, Partridge?"

"She was, sir."

"And is she still living, Partridge?"

"She is dead, sir."

"More and more," said Tyrone, drifting back into his musings: "more and more,

it is the dead who call to the quick, the quick who respond to the dead. It is the dead girl who calls to her lover—he who has remained on earth and is growing old and is thought to have outlived romance. It is the dead lover, young and fair, who calls to the aging matron. Now I am old, but she whom I love is young and fair—"

One would have said that his soliloquy had served as an incantation. The door had softly opened. Into the dusk of the room there had come a vision of the spirit to whom Tyrone had called—young and fair, clad in the garments of another generation.

It was Mélissine.

There was a lace cap on her head. She wore a light-blue sacque, soft and loose, of silk, richly laced, and embroidered with countless little flowers and garlands that ran through the whole gamut of colors from black to white. Under the sack was one of those diaphanous, classic one-piece robes, girdled high up almost under the armpits, such as the painter David designed at the outbreak of the French Revolution. This was white. It clung and floated to her slightest curve and movement. It revealed that her pink feet wore nothing but light gold sandals.

Tyrone watched her enthralled. She raised her hand slightly in good-fellowship greeting to Partridge. She kissed her father on the forehead, fondly, with the delicate concentration of a butterfly.

"And what has my darling been about this morning?" he asked.

"I've sewed. I've embroidered." Did she suspect what ailed her father? She caressed him. "I've copied another ten pages of your beautiful poem."

"Oh, Partridge!"

"Yes, sir!"

"I think you may serve our luncheon here."

"Perfectly, sir."

And Partridge silently withdrew.

Partridge knew what it was that ailed Tyrone. Partridge had served three generations of Tyrones. He knew them as he would have known them had he been the mother of the race. In the first place, Mélissine had told Partridge all about what

had happened in France—what had happened to herself. She had met Eugene Buckhannon there. That was the sum and substance of it. In the second place, Partridge had understood perfectly what this had meant to Nathan Tyrone.

Tyrone had embarked on a spirit honeymoon with a spirit bride. He had seen a younger man come and claim this spirit-bride for his own. And of this Tyrone was dying.

"You will want other clothes," Tyrone had said.

He would never have suggested that to Mélissine before the voyage. Then Mélissine had not been the daughter. She had been the bride of twenty years ago come back to inhabit the earth—a bride who, herself, had already had that touch of unearthliness about her because of the eighteenth century clothes she had preferred to wear. You get those old types in old civilization. Paris is full of types like that—disconcerting and sometimes beautiful characters straight out of the Middle Ages, even.

And Tyrone himself was the product of an older civilization than the civilization of America. He came from a family that had clung to candles, for whom newspapers did not exist, who led cloistral lives, who mated with women who died young.

Tyrone should have been reading an illuminated manuscript as he sat there in front of his fire.

He was followed by the lady of the house (Mélissine), who might have suggested a little marquise to any one who knew about such things—with her tricornered hat, and her long dark cloak enveloping her from head to heel. But Tyrone did not appear.

It was Partridge himself who assisted his mistress down the stoop and through the door of the cab—while Goodenough, also muffled, held his whip aloft.

There had followed a brief colloquy that the watchers could not catch, although they tried hard enough to do so. But they could see that she who was in the cab, was indicating that there was plenty of room there at her side. They could see that the old butler was protesting. And the butler apparently had his way. Finally he had climbed up to the seat at the side of Goodenough. And thus the equipage rolled away.

There were always mysterious happenings like that going on about No. 6.

Had they only known it, this tour was more wonderful than they thought. It certainly was very wonderful for Mélissine. She was going shopping. She was not only going to buy some Christmas presents, she was going to buy all the clothing she wanted for herself. Everything that she saw and really wanted she could have.

Such had been her father's orders to Partridge when they were setting forth.

Goodenough knew the stores. He drove them to store after store. The stores were crowded with Christmas shoppers. Sometimes the service wasn't very good—customers impatient, salespeople overworked; but Mélissine didn't mind—she was having the time of her life; and no one appeared to mind when Mélissine was served before her turn.

They wondered who she was. They looked after her, and as they did so they forgot that they were hurried and worried. She looked very beautiful and foreign. They could see how happy she was. She smiled at every one. But most of all she smiled at the old gentleman who accompanied her and insisted on carrying all the packages. They wondered who the old gentleman was. He must have been her grandfather. They seemed so devoted. And they must have been very rich, to judge

CHAPTER XXV.

THE LIGHT AND THE DARK.

SO, one day when there was not very much snow in Cinnamon Street, Goodenough had come driving up to No. 6—with a closed cab, this time, instead of an open one—and those who watched saw Partridge come out of the door. They noticed that he was dressed for an excursion. This meant that he was muffled up. He wore an overcoat. This really suggested the better but old-fashioned name of "great-coat"—it was so big and thick in every way. And Partridge carried a plug hat that was a genuine "beaver," the nap of it was so thick and soft.

from the money they spent. Nothing cost too much.

They had come into one of the largest and finest shops of all. It was very warm, and Mélissine tossed off her heavy cloak.

"Lined with sable," a woman whispered to another. "It must have cost a fortune."

"Look at her dress," said the other.

"Who can she be?"

"What a style! Is it something new?"

Mélissine had merely chosen one of the best winter dresses in her mother's trousseau. It was a dress she had always loved, yet one she had never worn before. Not even the dead, dear Mme. Tyrone could have worn it very often.

It was a heavy silk of dark blue—a very full skirt, a stiff bodice rather low at the throat where it was trimmed with a jeweled bar of Russian design. There were bands of sable fur across her shoulders, and nothing could have been more alluring than the contrast of this fur and Mélissine's nacre skin.

"Look at that designer sketching her sleeves," said one of the women.

"I don't blame him," said the other.

The sleeves were full to the elbow, where there was an undersleeve of old lace caught up in the angle of the elbow with a jewel.

Other designers were furtively following now—Irish, French, and Russian Jew, artists all, responsive to an inspiration, wondering what nameless genius had robbed this girl.

"*C'est magnifique!*"

"She must be a Rooshin! Some creation!"

"Where did she get it? You can't buy silk like that any more."

Did Mélissine notice? Perhaps. She enjoyed it if she did. She had a smile for every one.

And of all the people whom they so obviously interested there, one there was whom they apparently interested most of all. This was also a woman, and the woman herself was worthy of some note.

She was of a type that subtly suggested a wild animal; it was hard to tell just why. It was a little in the expression of her face—an expression that somehow meant that the owner of the face had a good appetite.

There was an animal beauty in her face. There was an animal grace in the lines of her shape and in her sinuosities when she walked. But all this so subtle and unpronounced that the observation might have been as much of the imagination as of mere sight.

This woman was otherwise notable—to any one who would have cared to remark such details. She was very pale. Her eyes were almost black. She had bright red lips and dark red hair. Her mouth was rather large. Her cheekbones were rather high. But her eyes were large also and her nose was comely. Altogether, there were plenty of men who would have thought her beautiful. At least, they would have called her beautiful if she had been younger. She was thirty, at least; which is old age, for a certain type of woman—her type.

This woman had first been struck by the appearance of Mélissine; but not greatly so, one would have said. It may have struck her as interesting merely that Mélissine should have been engaged in buying a gold cigarette-case. The woman also had been engaged in looking over the stock of cigarette-cases. It was Mélissine's idea that such a bauble might serve as her present for Buckhannon.

"Is he rich or poor?" asked Partridge, when she had sought his advice.

"I don't know," said Mélissine. "I imagine that he's poor. He's a student and lives in the Latin Quarter."

"That would be rather elaborate for a poor young man," Partridge counseled gently. "Er—eh—"

Partridge was troubled by a vague sense of embarrassment, a vague sense of fear, even, without knowing precisely why. Mélissine's cloak was heavy on his arm. It recalled to him the times—not so very long ago, it seemed to him—when on this self-same arm he had carried Mélissine herself. He found himself wishing that Mélissine were a child again, so that again he might carry her. Like that, he would have felt safer. He wished that people would not look at her so. Friendly they were, most certainly. But there were serpents and panthers in this jungle of New York.

So his thoughts ran.

The dark-eyed woman of the red lips was standing very close to Partridge and Mélissine now—in a position where she could look and look without herself being seen.

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN THE CAB BEHIND.

SHE also was studying the clothing of this girl with the bright gold curls.

There was an appraisal in the way she looked at the cloak that Partridge carried. The dark blue cloth was of the finest. The sables were worth a fortune. And the dress was so curious. Only the very rich could appear in a dress like that—of a style so odd and yet so beautiful—the unique design—the workmanship that had the touch of Paris in every seam and every fold.

There was a pleasure in the woman's face. But a psychologist perhaps would have said that it was a pleasure tinged with a killing desire. The killing desire deftly became the dawning purpose. She saw that Partridge was restless. She caught her breath. She shifted her position.

Partridge nailed his attention to Mélissine. "You were saying—"

Partridge had felt a pair of eyes upon him. Psychologists pretend that no one can "feel" another's gaze like that. None the less, Partridge had felt these eyes upon him, and he had turned, and had seen the woman of the dark eyes and the red mouth. The woman had that power of calm scrutiny that many wild animals possess. There was nothing unfriendly in it. She had recognized him, that was all, and had looked at him a bit fixedly.

Any one who had observed events as thus far related might have been excused for wondering if there had been recognition on Partridge's part as well. It would have been hard to say. Partridge had noticed her. That was what had thrown him off the track when he was talking to Mélissine. But he hadn't spoken to the woman, or nodded, or given any other of the customary signs of recognition. He had turned again immediately.

"Yet I feel that nothing is too good for him," said Mélissine.

"Quite true," said Partridge.

And it was clear that he was eager to move away.

Mélissine selected about the most expensive cigarette-case the display could offer. It was Partridge who inquired the price, and paid—with an uneasy sense, one would have said, that the animal-woman was still watching him—watching him lazily, and good-naturedly even, with the tranquil scrutiny, veiled and enigmatic, of one of the big cats.

Did Partridge suspect that, thereafter, he and Mélissine were being followed? Perhaps. There was a certain absent-mindedness about him from that time on when she asked his opinion on this and that. He did not openly turn and look back. He was too much of the carefully disciplined gentleman for that. Still, he may have given a look about him now and then as he and Mélissine loitered at this counter or that. And all the aisles were crowded.

They were so crowded with all sorts of people shoving about that Partridge had at last the opportunity to turn, quite unobtrusively. It was to find the woman with the dark eyes at his shoulder.

"Introduce me to her," said the woman, softly.

"Madame?"

"Who is she?"

"To whom do you refer?"

"I suppose you think that I'm not good enough."

Partridge made no answer—no answer in words. He tossed back his head a little. He cast an agonized glance from the corner of his eyes in the direction of Mélissine. She was engaged in an almost playful conversation with one of the shopgirls.

"You seem to have all the money in the world to spend on her," said the woman. She was speaking softly, almost pleasantly. "Did you think that you had bought me off?"

Partridge bethought himself.

"When you signed the last receipt," he said, "you also signed a statement that you had no claim upon Mr. Tyrone or upon the Tyrone estate whatsoever."

The woman laughed, softly—a mere purr.

"Indeed!"

"If you have anything further to say,"

Partridge pursued, still with his anxious eyes on Mélissine, "I must refer you to Judge Bancroft—our counsel—No. 160 Broadway."

The woman's voice slurred into something ugly.

"It isn't his address I want," she said, "but yours—and hers!"

Partridge saw that Mélissine was turning. A bit stifled, a bit flushed and agitated, he lurched to give her his attention. Oh, if she had only been a little child again, so that he might take her in his arms and flee, flee!

He did flee now, after a fashion, and Mélissine with him—out to the curb where Goodenough waited. But what was the speed of old Goodenough's horse in a race like this? He had seen the woman, leisurely, sure of herself, summon a taxi. And all the way back to Cinnamon Street, the taxi trailed behind.

Partridge said nothing to Nathan Tyrone about the strange woman who had spoken to him in the store and had followed him home. Several times Partridge was on the verge of doing so. But, after all, there was a limit to the things that servant could say to master and master say to servant, even when relations were such as theirs had always been.

And did Partridge have the right to ask the question he was burning to ask? What if Mr. Nathan had been guilty of an indiscretion in his youth? Not that Partridge believed him to have been guilty! He ascribed to Tyrone that beautiful innocence that most mothers will, in spite of all, ascribe to their sons. But this wasn't the reason that Partridge could not come right out and ask Tyrone: "Was this woman's mother, or was she not, anything to you other than an object of charity?"

The greater reason was that Partridge himself had that secret in his breast—the secret that he shared with Judge Bancroft alone, the secret that, not for his life's sake, would he have imparted to Tyrone or the daughter of Tyrone, these two whom he so greatly loved.

So Partridge held his peace. But he felt that there was a blow impending. He could only hope—and pray.

There was a double blow.

Partly at least could Mélissine aid him, and she did. But Partridge quaked—quaked in spite of his faith, in spite of such consolation as he could derive from that calendar that Mélissine had given him, and also from the presence of Mélissine herself. Mélissine and Partridge were each, as a matter of fact, of great service to each other at this time.

For Nathan Tyrone was slipping, each day a little further from this world into the next.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE WOMAN IN BLACK.

HE was like one of those men old Goodenough had mentioned—a part of him gone into the next world already. Every man is a crowd—a complex crowd in which all sorts of people move about and express themselves in various ways: Some good, some bad; some young, some old; some ugly, some as beautiful as Greek gods; some profane; some exalted. But one by one, as the days pass, some member of this multitude drops away and is seen no more. The young and the beautiful die and are laid away. The poet sings no more. And at last the man himself—the original, parent soul, the Adam—is left deserted. His only interest now is to join the silent multitude who have gone into the shadows.

It was like that with Tyrone.

That was what had happened to him that day in Notre Dame. It had happened to him even earlier. It had happened to him when he had seen Mélissine and Buckhannon talking to each other in the Gardens of the Luxembourg. Only he hadn't known it. But he had known it when he saw them together in Notre Dame.

That day, the last of his spirit-companions had left him.

Before that he had still been poet and lover, father and bridegroom, youth and old man. Suddenly, all these spirit-companions had winged away—to the music of the *Miserere* and the tolling of the bell—and he had been left deserted. His heart still beat. He could walk about in the world. His eyes

could see. He could eat and drink. But he was a mere imitation of a live man.

All this was the way he put it to himself. He had that sort of mind. Without Mélissine there was no life. There was no necessity for life. Once there had been such a necessity. This was no longer so. He had been supplanted.

Mélissine attended him with a purity of devotion that was perfect and beautiful. Even so, Tyrone could see that she awaited but one thing—the day that would bring her Eugene back to her.

Buckhannon had tarried in Paris to complete his year at the École des Beaux-Arts. Tyrone himself had insisted on this in a friendly sort of way. So had Mélissine.

But he was returning with the spring.

The snows of Cinnamon Street melted. The sparrows twittered in the eaves. There came a premonitory wind out of the south. Winter came back and slashed about in March. But the enemy was beaten. Again the south wind came up with all the reserves of the exhaustless tropics.

There was grass in the chapel-yard, and this went green. Here and there a crocus appeared in the grass. It was like the first note of a fairy orchestra. There was an old rose-vine against the side of No. 6. This also burst into floral music.

And then, one day, Buckhannon himself rushed into the street like the impatient lover that he was. He ran up the steps of No. 6. He rapped out his summons on the knocker of the white Colonial door.

The birds all sang. A butterfly drifted about in his honor like an attendant airplane. The flowers all cheered—that is, they sent up their perfume. Any one could have seen that this was a great event—that this was what the world had been waiting for.

However, there was a longish delay.

And, in the course of this longish delay, there arrived over the spring-time heart of Buckhannon a touch of cold—somewhat as if a breath of winter had come back to wither the blossoms a bit, burn the young verdure of the trees.

He cast a look back of him. There was the druggist across the street. The druggist had hinted at queer tales. Down there by

the chapel fence he saw the policeman, Hitchcock, and Goodenough. He caught a whiff of their ghoulish verse and dark whispers. This was the house with a bad name! This was the house with a bad name! This was the house with a bad name! But he bethought himself of Notre Dame.

The door opened.

Buckhannon would have sprung forward with a cry of joy, expecting Mélissine. Instead, it was Partridge who opened for him. Partridge was not the flute-player when he opened the Tyrone door to receive a guest for his masters. He was the perfect servant. Even so, he couldn't conceal something of chill, something of dread, something of mystery about him.

Had he said: "Pause, young man! There is mystery here!" his impression on Buckhannon's sensitive imagination would have been about the same. The bourdon of Notre Dame began to toll.

Said Buckhannon: "Is Miss—is Mr. Tyrone at home?"

This instead of the burst of song, figuratively speaking, that he had prepared. Were Notre Dame and Mélissine mere hallucinations?

There was a mystery about this house. There was no delusion about that. Good-enough was right—that time he had said that all old houses and all old men are haunted. He was literally right.

One would have said that Partridge himself was haunted right now—he the perfect servant, the butler *par excellence*, the immaculate gentleman who'd loved a lady, sir. Quite by accident, Partridge had let his eyes travel across the street. It was a habit of his, that rather backward tilt of the head and a glance into the distance. And Partridge was old. His eyes saw rather better at a distance than they did things close by.

There was the drug-store across the street. The drug-store occupied the basement of a little two-story frame building. There were living quarters on the upper floor, and almost always at the door of the hallway at the side of the drug-store there hung a card announcing that up-stairs there was a room to rent.

To-day the card wasn't there.

One of the upper windows was open.

At this window Partridge had seen a face—a calm and watchful face—a pale face with dark, dark eyes and red, red lips.

It all happened in an instant.

A man can glimpse eternity and all the fulness thereof in an instant of time.

And in that instant Partridge was telling himself that the Woman in Black had now come to lodge in Cinnamon Street, and that she had sought lodgment under the roof of a weird little man who knew many things and suspected more. And what would they have to say to each other—the druggist and this woman who also knew many things and most likely suspected more?

"Mr. Tyrone is ill, sir," Partridge heard his own gentle and well-modulated voice informing the visitor.

He heard the visitor say: "That is too bad. Will you announce me, please? I am Mr. Buckhannon—Mr. Eugene Buckhannon. I have just arrived from Paris. They were expecting me."

"Oh, yes, sir!" said Partridge aloud. To himself he said: "The Lord is our shield." And again aloud: "They were indeed expecting you, sir."

He bowed the visitor in.

But still there was a sort of riot within Buckhannon's self—an election-riot; two rival factions in there, each clamoring for the election of its candidate. And one of the candidates was Courage. And the other candidate was Fear.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE UNFINISHED STORY.

THERE was a drawing-room at the left of the hall and at the door of this Mélassine met him. She was dressed as the original model of the great Latour might have been dressed away back in the eighteenth century. And she was looking at him as the model may have looked at the painter—so modest, so demure, so filled with a divine and mysterious fire.

Her hair was brilliant and bright. It was almost an illumination in this dusky interior—a pale shimmer of gold—"like a rose upside-down," as the poet said—a yellow rose. Her throat and her shoulders were

bare except for the semi-transparent scarf she had drawn about them. The bodice was scant. There was a very full skirt, ruffled and crinolined. So far as color went, she was a symphony of pale yellows and pale blues. Her pink lips were tightly shut—so tightly shut that one would have said she was having difficulty to control the emotion that made her young breast rise and fall like that and which gave a visible vibrancy to her whole presence.

But there was no controlling the look in her dark-blue eyes. Something was dawning there—a dawn of flame.

And just the sight of her, and the flash of a thought that the whole universe had been organized since the dawn of time to the end that a girl like this should be waiting for him, Eugene Buckhannon, here and now, made Buckhannon feel like a prince in a fairy-tale. A thrill went through him that was like the casting off of all weight, all worry. He was taller, stronger, more magnificent than any one else in the world. He stepped forward with a gasp of thanksgiving.

"Do not disturb father just yet," said Mélassine.

She had spoken to Partridge. She had risen to the height of the occasion. She was perfectly self-possessed.

As for Partridge, he had disappeared.

And there were the two of them together—Mélassine and Eugene in the ancient drawing-room. It was a beautiful room—with the selected beauty that had survived for a century or so; and all the Tyrones had been sensitive to beauty. It was an eighteenth century room, paneled in old French walnut. There were panels either by or after Boucher on the wall. There was a Beauvais carpet on the floor. The furniture, of the period, was upholstered with Gobelin tapestry.

"Oh, Mélassine," breathed Buckhannon.

For a moment he had paused. He was artist as well as lover. Both personalities within him had fused and made him swoon almost—as if he had been in Tyrone's garden of poppies.

"Oh, Eugene," she answered him, playfully.

"I thought I had been with you always

—since you went away,” said Buckhannon. “I have, in spirit. But this transcends the spirit.”

She said nothing now. But she thrust out her hands. Her knees may have failed her, somewhat.

“You are so wonderful,” he informed her, after a long interval. “You would be wonderful anyway. But you are so wonderful in that dress.”

“It was my mother’s,” she told him, stroking his head.

She was enthroned in one of the Gobelin chairs. He was seated on the Beauvais carpet at her feet.

“What a pity it was,” he said, “that she ever died.”

“I shall never believe in the thing that people call death,” she informed him gently. “That would be too terrible. It would mean that soon father also would be dead.”

He looked up at her, searching for her meaning. “I was sorry to hear that he was ill,” he murmured.

Her blue eyes went liquid, but she smiled. “By and by,” she said, “it will be just as it was with you and me when we said goodbye to each other over there in Notre Dame. He will be in one place and I in another. But I don’t want to think of that as death. I don’t see why people should call that death, and why they should dress themselves in black. See! We are together again. I didn’t put on black when you and I were separated for a while.”

“You are altogether beautiful,” said Buckhannon.

“I wear these,” Mélassine informed him—and she indicated the clothes she wore—“because he has always wanted to see me like this.”

“Can you blame him?”

“But now he has given me permission to dress myself as other girls do.”

And thus the conversation drifted from death to dress as lightly as a butterfly might have drifted from poppy to rose, from rose to poppy.

But underneath all that they said and thought was the solid earth of rocks and hidden rivers. They loved each other. Life was dark and sometimes mysterious,

but on the whole life was very beautiful. And also—Mélassine had said—life was everlasting. Everlasting, albeit, back there in the music-room, sat Nathan Tyrone at the threshold of the brighter chamber men have always called death.

It was Mélassine herself who announced Buckhannon’s advent to her father.

“He wishes to speak to you alone,” said Mélassine.

Hastily, tenderly, she allowed Buckhannon to touch her lips with his own. And thus anointed and purified, so to speak. Buckhannon came into the presence of Mélassine’s father.

“I had been wanting to talk to you,” said Tyrone.

He sat nerveless in his chair in front of the fireplace. The air was mild but there was a fire on the hearth. There was a rug over the sick man’s knees. It smote Buckhannon to the heart to think that in a presence like this Mélassine had greeted him as bravely as she had, and had spoken her brave words.

“Yes, sir,” this with a fervor.

“Mélassine has told me,” said Tyrone. “that you and she are devoted.”

“There is nothing I wouldn’t do—”

“She tells me that you have plighted your troth.”

“God grant—”

The conversation was too momentous for Buckhannon. He could only falter his broken sentences.

“There was something”—Tyrone also was speaking with an effort; his breath and possibly his mind were wavering—“there was something that I felt I must tell you—and win your assent before I could approve.”

“If it concerns me—or my family,” Buckhannon began.

“It concerns Mélassine,” said Tyrone.

Buckhannon remained silent, eager, assenting already in his heart. There was nothing in his heart but the vision of Mélassine as he had seen her just now, and the love and the reverence that this vision inspired.

But it wasn’t to be always so.

They say that the higher a man goes on

the path the more killing are the tests he has to endure. It was somewhat like that now.

Tyrone murmured something about the necessity of unburdening himself of this thing that he had on his mind, else he couldn't die in peace. Buckhannon waited. The silence had become a crisping silence now. And there was Tyrone, gasping now for breath, unable for the present to say anything more.

Partridge, omniscient to his master's needs, came in.

"I'll come back to-morrow," Buckhannon whispered.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE NIGHTMARE.

THERE was a Swedish lyric that Buckhannon had run across somewhere. It was one that well might have had a place in old Goodenough's anthology of weird verse. It went like this:

I in a vision
Saw my lost sweetheart,
Fearlessly toward me
I saw her stray.
So pale! I thought then;
She smiled her answer:
My heart, my spirit,
I've kissed away.*

Mélistine's vision hovered wan about Eugene Buckhannon all that night as he tossed sleepless in his bed. Not all night, for late into the night he had walked, and walked, and walked—from Washington Square to Union Square, from Union Square to Madison Square, from Madison Square to Central Park, from Central Park to Riverside Drive. Even so, the vision had kept him company. There were no people in the squares or streets. These were fantoms whom he saw. The realities were these others:

Mélistine!

Nathan Tyrone!

Old Partridge of the Waxen Face!

Now that he thought of it, what a weird, weird person was Mélistine!—half child,

half woman!—a thing of exquisite life, dressed with the habiliments of the dead!

And what was the thing that her father had started to say to him? Was it merely that his daughter was an angel and that he, Buckhannon, should treat her as such? This would have been the natural thing. That's what he would have said if he, Buckhannon, had been her father!

But if this were the case, why should the butler, Partridge, have acted so strangely at the door? Why had he started like that, and stared, as would have started and stared one who suddenly realized some dreadful truth, or saw something dreadful that was invisible to other men? Was Partridge a poisoner? He didn't look like one. But wasn't it possible that Partridge had poisoned his master?—with his master's consent?—for some good purpose?—because of some benefit that this would bring to Mélistine?

Mélistine was one to inspire men to heroic sacrifices like that. Himself, Buckhannon, wouldn't he commit murder or suicide, on her account?

And through all these meditations, reveries, mad flights of fancy, the vision of Mélistine hovered there—like the pale sweetheart of the lyric he remembered. Lost? Would she ever be lost to him? His heart shuddered at the thought. And yet, such things had been.

He himself was like a lost soul in a haunted forest. Through this forest he groped his way to a solid oak-tree he could trust, and about this he flung his arms; and he clung to it, until he fell into at least something that resembled sleep.

The oak-tree was Faith.

He loved Mélistine. She loved him. God Himself had given her to him. In Notre Dame, God had given her him.

But Buckhannon knocked softly nevertheless when he came to the door of the old house in Cinnamon Street on the following afternoon. He had forced himself to wait until afternoon because he had so ardently wished to come at daybreak. He believed in discipline.

* Anders Oesterling's "Meeting of Phantoms" (in C. W. Stork's *Anthology of Swedish Lyrics from 1750 to 1915*).—Ed.

Softly the door was opened, and there stood Partridge. It struck Buckhannon that there was a greater air of mystery about Partridge than ever. Why?

Buckhannon hesitated. He swallowed. There was a little catch in his voice that he didn't like as he asked:

"May I see him?"

"This way, sir," said Partridge faintly.

And Partridge led Buckhannon into the music-room, whither Buckhannon had gone the day before. But the room was changed. The fireplace was dark and hidden by a screen. From above it the portrait that so resembled the portrait of Mélissine looked down through a sparkling haze of candle-light. It was curious that so many candles should have been lit in mid-afternoon. The light of them constituted a bedazzlement.

Then Buckhannon saw that the candles stood at the head and the foot of a sort of lofty couch and that on this couch lay the man he had come to see.

"He is dead!" gasped Buckhannon.

All Partridge could do was to bow his head. Partridge was strangled. Partridge was inarticulate. Not so Mélissine.

When Mélissine came in, it was almost as if Buckhannon was seeing again his fancies of the night. For she was pale. But she was dressed with as much lightness and beauty as she had shown the day before. Had she read the look in Buckhannon's eyes? If she had, she had answered it:

"This is the way he would have had me be," she whispered.

Buckhannon took her hand and pressed it to his lips. He was as strangled and inarticulate now as Partridge was. Then, after a while Mélissine spoke again. Her voice had taken a childish quality because of its tendency to break. But she was as brave as a little Jeanne d'Arc. It was as if she were fighting the fight alone and for all of them:

"He's merely gone away," she said. "He's merely gone where some day all of us will join him. It will be beautiful there. He will love it. He will love it better than France." Each sentence had its little gasp, its rising accent. "And why should we have faith," she queried gently, "if we can't have it at a time like this?"

Buckhannon looked into her eyes. She closed her eyes and two tears trickled out. He caught her in his arms and held her.

The neighbors must have been watching, watching. This night they had seen No. 6 become a center of sinister excitement. They had seen a sable wagon come and go. They had seen men dressed in black enter the house and go away again. Was somebody sick? Was somebody dead? One would have thought so—and yet there was no badge of mourning on the door.

They saw no sign of mourning about the house whatsoever until some time after they had seen the young man (Buckhannon) go into the house. Then they were rewarded.

It was just as if here, in front of their eyes, was happening the thing for which they had waited all these years.

A woman had crossed the street from the direction of the druggist's shop. The woman was dressed all in black. She *was* the Woman in Black. She was veiled in black. But they guessed that she was beautiful—from her graceful lines and her slightly sinuous walk as she mounted the stoop of No. 6 and lifted the knocker.

CHAPTER XXX.

MME. JENESCO.

BUCKHANNON had a highly intelligent eye. It was not only the well-trained physical eye of his profession. It was the sympathetic eye of the interpreter back of this physical eye—the eye of the dreamer and the imaginer. It was this eye, fine and complex, with which he had observed Partridge that first time Partridge had opened the door for him. It was the eye with which he now observed not Partridge only, but the Woman in Black, and Mélissine.

Buckhannon and Mélissine had come into the hall on their way to the drawing-room. They lingered when they heard the rap on the door. Partridge had wafted past them on his way to open.

When the Woman in Black came in it was as if, for the first time, death had entered.

This figure was like an incarnation of death. She was a personification of mourning, at any rate—a character out of one of those old, powerful pictures by Doré. It rather heightened the effect that her bearing and her lines were those of youth, not age. All the more it made her the Dark Angel. It was just as if Partridge had opened the door and then the Dark Angel had come in.

And there was something about the appearance of Partridge to indicate that this was the way he felt about it, too. There was a touch of terror about Partridge, certainly of distress.

Or was this merely something that he had brought with him from the room back there, where his master lay? Buckhannon was not to be left long in doubt.

The strange visitor had entered with an indefinable gust of haste and satisfaction. It was just as if she had said: "At last! At last!"—had said this with an inaudible voice that none the less was capable of shaking the souls of all of them. But once inside the door and the door closed behind her, she paused.

Buckhannon heard her whisper: "You know who I am."

It wasn't a whisper precisely, but her voice had been very soft. She had spoken to Partridge. Her words had carried with them a suggestion of authority.

Partridge wavered. She waited.

Partridge said: "Yes, *madame*."

In the meantime the woman had looked in Buckhannon's direction—had looked at him and Mélissine. Buckhannon felt a slight tremor at his side; he felt Mélissine's light hand creep into the hollow of his arm as if she were seeking for protection.

"I'd protect you, heart and soul, against all the fiends of hell," Buckhannon silently assured the owner of the hand.

There was an uncanniness about it—that veiled scrutiny of the unknown. The veil was black. The visitor's face was invisible through it, but her eyes glowed, only dimly discernible.

"Introduce me," the visitor had next demanded.

"You have come to see Mr. Tyrone," quavered Partridge. "You knew of the misfortune."

It was manifest to Buckhannon that Partridge was seeking time—manifest that Partridge was up against a situation that was all dark confusion for him. Buckhannon felt sorry for the old man. And his heart fairly yearned over Mélissine. All the same, this was a continuation of his nightmare. Not that there was anything horrible about it. There had been nothing horrible about the nightmare itself. It had been just a vague drift of doubts and melancholies. That was all. None the less he could feel a cold twitching of his spine. Had there been bristles on his spine, as there doubtless had been on the spine of some remote ancestor, these bristles would have been drawn erect.

"Introduce me," the woman ordered softly, but with a note of finality.

And thereupon she threw back her veil.

Her face was very pale. It wasn't a dead white. She had a fine complexion, but all of the one tone—ivory white. This accentuated the rest of her coloring—her dark red hair, her bright red lips, and her brilliant large eyes which were almost black. It wouldn't have taken a trained observer to decide that her eyes were penciled and that her lips had likewise been sagaciously enhanced.

But only a trained observer would have noted perhaps that mixture of boldness and caution she radiated about her. It was something to remind one of a powerful wild animal, furtive and alert, which finds itself in the midst of strange surroundings, yet in a place where it has long wanted to be.

Buckhannon and Mélissine had not been standing still. They had advanced somewhat. All that had transpired thus far had developed deftly, without apparent let or lapse of time.

"*Madame*—"

Partridge had quavered this.

The visitor turned from him with a certain contempt. She had again cast her eyes on Buckhannon and Mélissine. They came back to Buckhannon. For what seemed to him like a long, long time, the woman was looking at Buckhannon and he was looking at her.

She wasn't old. She wasn't more than thirty, at most. But there was an oldness

in the expression of her eyes and her mouth—this heightened rather than diminished, as is so usually the case, by the artifice she had used to counterfeit youth. And, oddly enough, there was something in this detail that stirred Buckhannon's heart to a quiver of pity.

Anyway, the woman rewarded him with a smile. The smile was like the flash of recognition a wild animal would have shown—veiled and enigmatic.

Whereupon Buckhannon's pity became a vague little whiff of terror.

It was a terror compounded of all the things he had heard, or which had reached him by way of suggestion—from the druggist, from Hickcock, the policeman, and Goodenough, the coachman.

Buckhannon had given a hasty glance to Mélissine. There was an impulse in his mind to tell Mélissine not to worry, not to be frightened. But Mélissine herself was looking at the strange woman with a blossoming sympathy.

It was evident that Mélissine, moreover, was conscious of her duties as hostess.

"Do you wish to see father?" Mélissine inquired gently, stepping forward.

The visitor smiled at Mélissine.

She had paused just long enough to give a look at Partridge. To any one who would have cared to interpret, it was a look that said: "And that's enough for you!"

She approached Mélissine with her swift and sinuous movement, shaking out as she did so a perfume of the Lord knows what from her sable garments—something heady and Oriental. She put her arm around Mélissine—Buckhannon drawing back respectfully, not to say distrustfully, to give her room.

"I am Mme. Jenesco," she announced in her warm, soft voice. "I am sure that we are going to love each other."

CHAPTER XXXI.

OF FLOWERS AND SPECTERS.

PARTRIDGE had remained near the door where the woman had left him.

Partridge was making a pretense that the fastening of the door was out of order.

But when Buckhannon came up and spoke to the old man, Partridge turned and reeled slightly until his back was against the door. He looked as if he needed the support. He looked as if he were being strangled by a set of invisible fingers.

Mme. Jenesco and Mélissine were for the moment out of hearing. They had gone into the music-room.

"Who is she?" Buckhannon demanded.

"She is Mme. Jenesco," Partridge gasped.

"I know that," said Buckhannon steadily. "I was just introduced to her." He looked at his hand, as if Mme. Jenesco's fingers might have left their trace there. His fingers were still conscious of the contact. He raised his hand nearer his face. The perfume also lingered.

"She was married, I believe, to a M. Jenesco," said Partridge. "A Rumanian, sir, if I remember correctly."

Buckhannon put out his hands and let them rest lightly on the old man's shoulders. Buckhannon had the feeling in his arms that he could have grappled with a giant—that he would have grappled with anything that he could see or get a hold of. But his hands were gentle. Partridge was fragile, he was in misery; and Buckhannon knew by this time how Mélissine loved him.

"I want you to understand now and always," Buckhannon said, "that I am your friend."

"Thank you, sir."

"There seems to be some sort of a mystery here."

It was a phrase that had become familiar in his thought, but which never before had he spoken aloud. The look that Partridge returned to him was a confirmation.

"If there is anything that concerns your welfare or Miss Tyrone's," Buckhannon hurried on, "I want you to tell me what it is."

"I dare not!"

"Dare not?"

"I dare not! Do not ask me, sir."

"Why should you try to hide it? I'm your friend. Can't you trust me? God knows I'm asking a greater trust from Mélissine!"

"God bless you, sir!"

"Tell me," Buckhannon pleaded.

"I—I never thought, sir—that it would come to this," said Partridge.

And any one could have told that Partridge was not confronting the immediate incident so much as he was regarding the whole vast landscape of the past.

"What has this woman to do with it?"

"I must ask you to be patient. So would Mr. Tyrone have wished."

"She's a bad woman."

"She looks it—I have suspected—"

"Have her thrown out of the house," said Buckhannon, whose only thought was to save Mélissine from contamination. An electric needle was plucking at his mind. It buzzed and burnt with George Sterling's line:

Smiles bloodily against the leprous moon!
 . . . sated at her feast,
 Smiles bloodily against the leprous moon . . .

"No! No!" cried Partridge.

"Why not?"

"I—we can arrange—"

"Before God," said Buckhannon, and he was declaring this to himself as much as he was to Partridge, "I love Miss Tyrone. I'll allow nothing to come between us."

When men say something to some one else, they often listen to themselves. Buckhannon was now haunted by the thought that what he said sounded false even to his own ears. He knew that while he made his declaration, and was listening to it, he was also hearing the voice of Tyrone—Tyrone trying to tell him something; and now Tyrone was dead.

In his extremity, Partridge was casting about hither and yon, seeking for something that he could cling to. Curiously enough it was something he had read a long time ago. He controlled himself. He was getting back his strength. His mild eyes met Buckhannon's squarely.

"Let us not strive," he said. "Let us be gentle."

"But this—" Buckhannon began. "Tell me: Is it anything that impinges on the honor of Mélissine?"

"She need never know."

"She need never know what?"

"If you lack faith—if you are afraid," said Partridge, "it were better that you go."

"I'll not go," said Buckhannon. "I'll never go but that she goes with me."

"God bless you, sir. Pardon me, but—we'll need you. The Lord has sent you in this the hour of our need."

Partridge had permitted himself no sleep since twenty-four hours at least. Old men require less sleep than young ones do. Still, he was much wrought up. He wasn't very robust.

"What do you want me to do?" queried Buckhannon, after an interval.

"Should you care to, sir, I would suggest that you take Miss Tyrone into the garden for a breath of air. She needs it. She wouldn't go alone. She would go with you."

"And *her*!"

It was a reference to the Woman in Black.

Partridge drew himself up. "Leave her to me, sir. I shall try to do whatever is best."

There was the gate between the Tyrone property and the yard of the abandoned chapel. Through this gate Mélissine and Buckhannon made their way. The early spring twilight was in the air, also a smell of grass and trees and flowers. The hour and the place were such as Buckhannon had dreamed them—many and many a time while he was still in Paris and Mélissine was in New York. Thus had he walked with her in his thought, and he had been certain that not heaven itself could have been otherwise.

Yet here he was, miserable and haunted!

He turned to Mélissine. He concealed all that he could of the doubt that was assailing him.

"Who was that woman?" he asked.

"I never saw her before in my life," Mélissine replied. "She is a curious creature. It is very strange."

"What is very strange?"

"She said that she was glad that at last we had been brought together. She spoke as if she was intending to come here to live."

I think that it was about that she wanted to speak to Partridge."

Partridge was in there speaking to her now.

Buckhannon held his peace. It would have to be as Partridge said. He would have to be patient. But he was sad.

Mélinesse, feeling the sadness that was upon him, paused—and made him pause, with a gentle pressure on his arm—and she held up a rose that he might smell it. But as Buckhannon inhaled the fragrance of the flower and closed his eyes with a hope of shutting out everything else, all that he could think of was Nathan Tyrone, and Partridge, and the Woman in Black, and their ghostly confrontation.

The shadows deepened. The candlelight glimmered through the windows of the music-room. There for a time Mélinesse and Buckhannon could hear a murmur of voices—as if the three who were in there arranged some new edict of fate.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE DARK CLAIMANT.

IT was a ghostly confrontation, indeed, that which was taking place now in old No. 6 Cinnamon Street. For a time Mme. Jenesco and Partridge had lingered there in the silent music-room with Nathan Tyrone—and all the other Tyrones looking down from the walls.

"I hope," said Partridge, "that you said nothing to Miss Tyrone."

For a while longer the visitor continued to look at the pictures on the wall. She looked at them with a certain satisfaction. From her bearing it might have been doubtful whether she had heard Partridge at all.

"Not, of course," Partridge pursued, "that there was anything you could have said to disturb her peace of mind."

He was stumbling. The woman turned and surveyed him with a degree of amused contempt. She took her time about her survey. But if she intended to squelch Partridge, reduce him to a further confusion, she missed her guess. Partridge was gradually getting still more of his strength

back, reassuming the poise that had become native to him during his years of service.

"Your coming here," he reminded her, "was very irregular."

She raised a shoulder slightly. She said: "Indeed!"

"I have always counseled you not to come here," Partridge continued softly. Partridge was stooped, but this was the stoop of age rather than of any humility supposed to attach to his station. His face and his voice were dignified.

"I am not sure," the woman retorted slowly, "that you haven't taken a good deal upon yourself."

"I was constrained to," Partridge informed her. "Mr. Tyrone honored me with his confidence in so many ways. I did not misjudge his own wishes in the matter."

The woman reflected. She had the air of one who listens to the mind rather than the heart. But she took a handkerchief, in a leisurely way, from the black bag she carried. The handkerchief had a black border. She touched her eyes with it.

"There is no occasion for showing yourself so heartless," she announced.

Partridge also meditated, a trifle wonder-struck.

"If I have seemed heartless," he said, "I beg of you to accept my apology. I assure you that I am not heartless. Anything that I have said was merely dictated by my devotion to Mr. Tyrone and to Miss Tyrone. He had never informed her of his difference with his father. At least, I am quite certain that he never told her of the causes of that difference. Miss Tyrone has an inquiring mind. Your coming here, and your assumption—again I shall have to ask your pardon if what I say should wound you—your assumption of friendship—not to say familiarity—"

"That's enough!" the woman broke in upon him. "You've said quite enough!"

There was no appearance of grief about her, real or assumed. There was something beginning to simmer inside of her—something that may have been latent when she came here. She returned her mourning handkerchief to her bag.

"True," said Partridge. "We shall consider the interview at an end."

Mme. Jenesco didn't move, except for the sort of tense vibrancy about her. She looked at Partridge.

"Perhaps," she said softly, "I have decided to remain."

"I am getting a little old," said Partridge. "My hearing is not what it should be. I must have misunderstood."

"You heard what I said."

"And I beg to remind you that you heard what I said. I desire that we bring this interview to a close before Miss Tyrone returns. I shall further suggest, *madame*, that you do not return here again."

The sultriness about the woman increased, but outwardly she maintained a perfect control of herself—she did except for the purring note that came into her voice. There was a purr about the entirety of her. She suggested a panther—a black panther—in the presence of some new but fascinating prey.

"Do you still think that you are expressing Mr. Tyrone's wishes when you speak to me like that?"

There was just enough mockery in her voice to stir Partridge's indignation.

"I deny your right to ask."

"You have always been very devoted to the Tyrones, have you not?"

"I always have, and I am—to such a point that I shall permit no one to endanger Miss Tyrone's happiness. Do not make me summon a policeman."

"Go ahead and summon a policeman, if you want to. That may be as good a way as any to find out just where we stand."

"What do you mean—'where we stand'?"

"You ought to know."

There followed another silence while Partridge stood there—now at a loss and with his mouth open trying to imagine what she meant; and while Mme. Jenesco looked at him with a red-lipped smile.

"If you refer," said Partridge, softly, "to your unfortunate mother—"

"Unfortunate's the word!"

"It is the word. God pity you that you should have forced me to refer to her as such. Is it possible that you have forgotten all that he did—for her—and you?"

The woman smiled at him. Her lips were parted now, and her breast was rising as if she were a little short of breath.

"I remember," she said. "I was fifteen years old when my mother died. Brought up the way I was a girl knows a lot—and can guess a lot—by the time that she's fifteen. I wasn't brought up like that little blonde, out there. I suppose you know that, too, don't you?"

"I request you to leave the house."

"You can save your stage stuff," she mocked him. "You'll need all of it a little later." Her voice took on an ugly drawl. "Say! What do you think I am, anyway? Do you think that just because he"—she tossed her head to indicate Nathan Tyrone lying there—"put something over on my mother that you can put something over on *me*? Why, you're nothing but a servant! You're nothing but a poor old man! I was feeling sorry for you. I came here with the best intentions in the world. What do you mean by insulting my mother's memory just because she was unfortunate?"

"God forbid!" cried Partridge. "And this in *his* presence!"

"And where else?" Mme. Jenesco demanded, with a slow lash of passion. "Why not?"

"I don't know what you mean!"

"You lie!"

Partridge raised a groping hand. He forgot what he had raised it for. He let it fall again. He closed his eyes.

"You lie," the woman repeated, "and you know you lie. You've known it all along. You knew it as well as *he* knew it himself—and you stand there ready to deny it. Don't you dare to deny it."

Partridge's voice came in a gasp:

"Deny what?"

"*That Nathan Tyrone was my father!*"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A BID FOR CHARITY.

PERHAPS it was Méliissine's calendar that Partridge saw through his closed eyes. Perhaps it was that very quotation that he had recalled a little earlier in the hall when he was talking to Buck-

hannon. That sort of an expression came into his face:

"And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient."

He would cease to strive. He was going to be gentle and patient. He was going to try to teach. The woman watched his change of expression. Something of her own passion diminished.

"You started me," she said, as if almost in apology. I'm just as eager to be a lady as any one. God knows I'm tired enough of being the other thing."

It was a sincere note. It sufficed to cause Partridge to look at her again—with a shade of fresh courage.

"I trust that you will believe me," he said, still shakily, "that I have acted and spoken, hastily perhaps, but without malice. Your mother was brought to this house by Mr. Tyrone when she was sick and friendless. He was her true friend."

The woman cut in on him. But one would have said that the bitterness in her tone was drawn from the bitterness of her own experience.

"Bah!" she exclaimed. "Men always say that!"

But Partridge persisted—patient, eager to teach.

"You could not have known Mr. Tyrone," he said gently, "thus to classify him with other men—not in respect to his relations with women. He was a man of the purest life."

"How do you know?"

"I knew him from the time he was born. I knew him—you might say almost—long before he was born. I knew his grandfather. He and I were together with General Grant. I was with his father many years. They were like that. Oh, they were too proud to have sullied themselves!"

Again the woman interrupted him. She fortified herself with a declaration.

"I'm not saying anything against him. I'm not saying that he wasn't better than most men. But he was a man. I love him. I honor him—"

"I knew," sobbed Partridge—"I knew that you would see the light."

"I honor him," the woman pursued, dis-

regarding the interruption, "as a daughter should."

Partridge collapsed.

"If it's a matter of money—" he faltered.

The woman stuck to her line of argument. "He was a man like any other man, though, when it came to that," she persisted. "You'll admit yourself that my mother was young and beautiful."

"I do admit it," said Partridge, with a gust of fervor. "It was her beauty that moved him to commit this act of folly. He always loved beauty so! He could never love anything ugly, either in word, or thought or action."

"Then what are you trying for to make him out as the other kind?"

"I am not."

"You are. He brought her here to this house, didn't he? You say so yourself that he did. And he kept her here, didn't he? You admit that, too. And I suppose that you expect me to believe, and that you would have the world to believe, that he did it"—her voice became a taunt—"all for charity!"

"I do. It was charity. He was a poet. He was a gentleman."

She was bitter again.

"Oh, I know your gentlemen!"

"He was all that the word implies."

"That's right! They do that sort of thing—when a girl happens to be beautiful and happens to be poor. What do you know of what passed between them? You weren't sitting there watching them all the time. Compromised her! Kept her here until he was tired of her—"

She was saying other things, not all of which Partridge heard. It was a voice inside of himself that Partridge heard—the voice of a doubt. Was the woman right? It was a searing, darkening, damning doubt, and one that Partridge prayed against with all the fervor of his soul. Yet it was there. He recognized it for something that he had heard and seen before—a specter with a voice. Why not? What would there have been so strange if Nathan Tyrone had succumbed—first pity, then sympathy, then love, then a flame or two of passion—when he, Mr. Nathan, was still so young and inexperienced.

None the less, Partridge pleaded.

"It is not so! It is not so!"—and Partridge cast his two hands into the air. But he was not pleading to the woman. He was pleading to his own momentary loss of faith. Again he told the old tale of his master's goodness, gentleness, pride of soul, love of beauty. He even referred to that one and only and most beautiful passion in his life—for Mme. Tyrone and Mélissine.

Mme. Jeneco let him talk. Now he was on familiar ground. She let him get rid of some of his emotion in this safe way.

"And me! What was he doing for me all this time?"

"He was generous—"

"With money!"

"No man would have done more."

"What good did money do me? It wasn't money that I needed. It was love! It was real love! It was a father's love! Instead of that it was money—money—nothing but money! It's always been that when I wanted something else. They stuck me in a school that I didn't want to go to. They gave me an education that I didn't want. And when I ran away from it, looking for something that my heart craved—you know what happened to me—and what always happens to girls like that—and they offered me money—more money! Damn you, standing there and talking about money! I might have been like that pale-faced little blonde out there—as I had the right to be—and the better right."

She had advanced on Partridge almost as if she could have struck him. But it wouldn't have been him that she would have struck so much as it would have been the symbol of what she had learned to hate. She had been speaking with a subdued intensity. But at the very climax of her denunciation she stopped, her voice broke into a little sob. There were tears in her eyes.

There, for a moment, Partridge looked as if he were sorely tempted to take her into his arms and console her. He was a gentle old soul. He wasn't the type to see any woman weep without himself being deeply moved. He started to console her—a broken, inarticulate word.

But the woman broke out, tearful, but still furious:

"I tell you I'm going to claim my own! I'm coming to this house to live. I'm here and I'm going to stay. I'm tired of living like a beggar—now that I'm getting to be too old to be anything else."

Partridge had turned. He walked with a tottering step uncertain of his destination. Mechanically he straightened a chair. For a while he was standing with his face to the wall. He raised his hand to his forehead. He raised it a little higher and straightened the portrait of Mr. Eliphalet Tyrone.

The woman took advantage of the lull to regain control of herself. She opened her hand-bag. She looked at herself in the small mirror it contained. She straightened her mourning toque. She touched up her dark red hair where it curled out from under her toque over her temples.

But she must have appreciated that her battle was far from won as she closed her bag and turned to look after Partridge again. She gave a slight start. Maybe she felt that she was in the presence of something she did not altogether comprehend.

Partridge had been standing at the side of Nathan Tyrone looking down into his master's face. He was as if unconscious—Partridge was—of any other presence in the room. While the woman was still looking at him, Partridge slipped down to one knee. He bowed his head.

She didn't care to look too much. She strolled over to the open but shuttered window. She opened the slats of one of the shutters. She looked out. The long spring twilight had begun. Thorough the dusk she could see Mélissine Tyrone and Eugene Buckhannon slowly walking through one of the paths of the old graveyard. They were arm in arm. Buckhannon's head was bowed.

Beyond them, in the street, leaning against the iron pickets of the graveyard fence, like the figure of one who would have entered there to rest—even as she sought rest in this forbidden house—she saw some one whom she recognized as old Good-enough, the familiar coachman of the street.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

Vendetta

by

George J. Brenn



THE VOICES IN SPACE

OVER the wires of the telephone, day and night, go the voices of men and women speaking their lines in the drama of life. An ever-changing theme it is. The stage reaches from ocean to ocean. The players are constantly changing; the scenes are different, but the action never stops.

Now a flash of comedy—gaiety, and mile-a-second laughter leaps over unreckoned space. Now a curt command, and across a continent the wheels of commerce move. Again the scene shifts—grim tragedy stalks the boards—a cry for law and justice vibrates into the night!

So runs the endless drama of the wires.

—From the *Telephone Review*.

“LOOK you,” whispered Antonio Corrado to his brother-in-law, Luigi Zarco, “the alibi I shall give you will be perfect—faultless! Shall it be said that a Zarco has failed to sustain the family honor? Shall the old father in Catania die sorrowing that the dog of a Verga still lives?”

“He speaks truth,” put in young Angelo Zarco, brother of Luigi, impetuously. “Let me only—”

“No, it is not so written,” interrupted Corrado, chidingly. “It is for your brother, the elder, to strike.”

“But he will not,” retorted Angelo. “He quails at the thought; he is a woman!”

A scowl darkened Luigi's face, and as quickly disappeared. He moved the goblets on the oilcloth covered kitchen table

and refilled them from the straw-covered green bottle. Then he broke the silence.

“Listen, Angelo, *giovinetto*, and you too, Tony. The vendetta is a century old. True, the Vergas were the first to kill. Many have since felt the keen thrust of the black stiletto. Mario, my brother, was found with the knife between his shoulders, when I was but a lad. He had been to Palermo for a holiday, and was on his way home when they killed him. I swore the ancient oath of the Zarcos that a Verga must pay.

“Alfredo Verga, (a peaceful youth, it is admitted) sailed to America. I followed him here, but could not find him. Then I worked—saved. I am rich. Twenty horses I have—ten trucks. I am a contractor—padrone. I sent for both of you, paying your way.

"I—I am American! Here such things are done another way. The law gives justice to all. It is not for me to evade it nor to cheat it. What if Verga did come here to Hampton City a month ago, with his fruit and oil importing business? Has he wronged me? Should he not have his chance to grow rich—prosper?"

"By Sant Antonio, *you* are the *giovinetto!*" swore Angelo. "Bring forth the long box that I may have the black dagger and I will do that which the honor of the family requires." The boy's dark eyes flashed vengefully.

"The boy is right," seconded Corrado. "Remember your oath. I would not have a child defend the family name; rather would I strike the blow myself, for the sake of Teresa, your sister and my wife."

"Go, then, and do so," thundered Luigi. "I strike not—nor shall the boy. Do you owe nothing to me? Had you a lira when I sent for you? And now, with a shop full of jewels, rings and brooches, with a clean white collar on your neck each day, you live like a prince. Shall all that be risked—shall you sit in the chair-of-death for the sake of a childish oath?"

"Bah, there is no risk, I tell you," boasted Corrado. "If there is, let it be mine. Surely you can do the small thing I ask. True—you are like the Americans; in me flows the true blood of Sicily. So it is with your sister. Night after night she says in sorrow: 'Alfredo Verga still lives—Luigi has forgotten!' For Teresa will I do this deed."

"So be it, then," announced Luigi, after a moment's indecision. "Yours is the risk. What is it you would have us do?"

"Draw closer," commanded the brother-in-law, again resorting to a whisper.

The brothers moved their chairs closer to Antonio, Luigi stolidly and with deliberation, and Angelo with hasty enthusiasm.

"Every morning for a week there came to the window of my jewelry shop in Harcross a young girl, perhaps seventeen years old. Pretty she was, with black hair, very red cheeks and gray eyes.

"I watched her, and noted that she regarded with longing a filigree bracelet. In a day or two I learned more of her—her

name, Maria Reilly, and that she worked for the Telephone Company across the street."

"To the plan, 'Tonio," burst out Luigi, impatiently. "Waste not my time with tales of those who gaze in your shop window."

"My safety and your honor rest with this girl," answered Corrado, calmly. "Do not interrupt. I had thought of a scheme and this girl's story proved to my satisfaction that it would work.

"Since Verga appeared in Hampton City I have scarcely thought of aught else but the vendetta, nor would Teresa allow me to forget it, had I so desired. So when the girl came to the window one day, and gazed at the bracelet, I stepped out of the store and spoke to her.

"You like the bracelet, *signorina?*" I asked.

"Sure," she gave answer. Then I told her if she would give me certain information I desired, the bracelet would be hers. And that she did. A wretched bauble it was, and cheap for the news she gave me."

"Come, come," expostulated Luigi. "What is the plan you have?"

"Patience!" remonstrated Antonio. "It is a simple matter for me to leave my home in Harcross at night, visit Hampton City, do the small business I have in my mind, and return to Harcross with no one the wiser."

"But," objected Luigi, "the police will learn of feud and the whole family will be suspected—even you. How then will you account for the manner in which you spent the time on this particular evening?"

Corrado's teeth gleamed in an ugly smile.

"Verga lives in rooms above his store," he said. "An ancient dame, almost deaf and half-blind, attends to his few wants. Already I have keys—can gain access to his bedchamber. Whether or not the old woman is aroused after I have struck, I do not care. In fact, I should like her to know the exact time of the occurrence, so that she may inform the police!"

"Fool!" rasped Luigi, while even Angelo gasped.

"Nay, brother," retorted Corrado. "Not

fool, nor yet madman. It is my hope that the police will be told the exact hour!

"But," objected Luigi, "if they are told Verga was—was—"

"Accorded his just desserts," suggested Antonio.

"Yes. If they are told it was midnight, you and Angelo and I will each be asked where we were and what we did at that time. Angelo and I can speak the truth, but what of you?"

"I shall say I was at home."

"But they will not believe."

"Teresa shall say I was at home."

"Still they will not believe. Proof will be required."

"They shall have proof, I promise you," beamed Antonio, enigmatically. "For that one evening, Beppo, who lives on the floor above me, shall be Antonio Corrado. Beppo is indebted to me in many ways and will do this for me gladly. Is he not from Messina, in Sicily? Does he not know of the vendetta?"

"But the proof?" urged Luigi.

"Beppo works hard all day and never leaves the house at night. Any one will believe him when he says he was at home. What matters it that he is in my rooms instead of his own?"

Luigi appeared to be on the verge of again losing patience, but his brother-in-law forestalled him.

"My plan is this: The night I choose must be one on which you stay late at your office on Lock Street, working on your accounts. The policeman on the beat always stops in your place when the lights are burning, as he goes off duty. Can you keep him there for a short time?"

"That we can," asserted Angelo. "We have only to bring out the chianti and he will stay an hour or more. He has often done so."

"Good. You and Luigi and the policeman will be there. At eleven o'clock Verga will die. But at quarter of eleven I will call you on the telephone from my home, and will talk to you until quarter past eleven."

"Then who attend to Verga?" asked Luigi.

"I. Have I not said Beppo will be

Antonio Corrado? Beppo will talk to you, but in my name! The policeman will know where you were, where Angelo was, and that I was at Harcross, six miles distant, talking to you by telephone, when Verga met his fate!"

"They will still suspect you," muttered Luigi, hoarsely, "even though you are not seen coming or going."

"I shall not be seen," Antonio assured him, calmly, "and there will be other proof. When Beppo makes the telephone call he will say: 'This is Antonio Corrado. I wish to speak to Luigi Zarco in Hampton City, whose telephone number is Hampton 407-W.'"

"The telephone girl will write all this on a sheet of paper—a white ticket. It is used to make the charge for the telephone call. You see, I obtained valuable information for the bracelet I gave the girl."

Luigi and Angelo exchanged nods of admiring approval.

"Then," continued Antonio, "if any of us is suspected, the policeman will say he knew where you two were, but did not know to whom you talked until you told him. The detectives will inquire from the Telephone Company—they always do. The sheet of paper will be produced and will substantiate our story. Is it not clear?"

The brothers nodded again. Luigi, carried away by his brother-in-law's cunning and craft had forgotten his alleged Americanism and was once more a Zarco of Sicily, whose family hated that of the Vergas. The three completed their plans.

Two nights later Alfredo Verga was stabbed to death while he slept. He had turned off the lights in his store at nine o'clock in the evening, locked up, and had climbed the stairs to the rooms he occupied on the upper floor of the little frame building.

At ten o'clock he retired, according to his fixed custom.

An hour later the old housekeeper, who slept in an adjoining room, was aroused by the sound of creaking footsteps outside her door. She asked who was there. For a moment there was silence; then followed the crash of an overturned chair, the door

slammed and a person could be heard descending the stairs in evident haste.

The old woman felt her way about in the dark until she found a candle, lit it, and inspected the premises. In Verga's room she discovered what she had fully expected to see—her employer stretched across the bed, the traditional black-handled stiletto embedded in his heart!

Throwing open a window, she raised an alarm. Neighbors responded, and soon the rooms were crowded with curious, morbid Sicilians who viewed the grim evidence of the tragedy and shrugged their shoulders in a fatalistic manner. It was some time before the police were notified.

Chief Walsh of Hampton City's Police Department assigned Ed Bourke to the case. Bourke had earned the respect and good-will of a large part of the city's foreign population, largely by reason of his fairness and fearlessness. Therefore, while the former natives of Sicily with whom he talked about the case were taciturn to a marked degree, it was not long before he had obtained a rather complete history of the Verga-Zarco vendetta from other sources.

At half past three of the afternoon following the tragedy Ed Bourke had rounded up Luigi and Angelo Zarco, Antonio Corrado and his wife, and had produced them at the office of Public Prosecutor Reynolds. A preliminary investigation was being made to determine whether sufficient facts were immediately available for the Grand Jury. Chief Walsh was present and requested Bourke to remain.

"You say you were at your office in Lock Street until half past eleven last night?" asked Prosecutor Reynolds in his mild, inoffensive manner, directing the question to Luigi.

The latter nodded.

"Where was your brother, Angelo?"

"With me."

"What were you doing?"

"Working on our payrolls."

"Sure?"

"Sure."

"Any one else there?"

Luigi's eyes evaded the prosecutor's frank gaze—he hesitated.

"Come, speak up," urged Chief Walsh, gruffly. "Who else was there?"

"A policeman—Officer Bingham."

"What was he doing there?" Walsh inquired sharply.

"He goes off duty half past ten. He stopped in to talk. That is all."

"Bourke, run out and tell my chauffeur to drive around Bingham's beat, find him and bring him here at once."

Bourke slipped out of the office and returned almost immediately. The prosecutor had turned his attention to Corrado.

"Where were you at eleven o'clock last night?"

"Home—in Harkness."

"What were you doing?"

"Eleven o'clock?" queried Antonio.

"Yes—eleven o'clock."

"Talking on the telephone."

"To whom?"

"Luigi Zarco."

"How long were you talking?"

"About half an hour."

"What were you talking about?"

"Business—some money I owe him."

"What for?"

"He loaned me money that I might open the jewelry shop. I pay him back a little every month."

"Well?"

"This time I tell him I am mailing a check for twice the regular amount. It should have been in his mail to-day."

"What time did you mail it?"

"Six o'clock last night—when I closed my store."

"Bourke, you get that check and let me see it," thundered Walsh.

Bourke nodded. Reynolds resumed his questioning.

"Did it take you all of ten minutes to tell Luigi that you had mailed him a check?"

"You do not understand," corrected Luigi, pleasantly but deliberately. "I said I talked with him for half an hour."

"About the check?"

"The check—yes; also about the contracting business, about my wife, Teresa, who is Luigi's sister, and about—oh, everything!"

Reynolds turned to Teresa with a smile.

"Now, Mrs. Corrado, will you please tell me where you were at eleven o'clock last night?"

"In bed," answered Teresa, positively.

"Asleep?"

"Yes, *signor*."

"What did your husband have to say to Luigi over the telephone about you?"

"I do not know. I was asleep. Not until this morning did I know he telephoned."

"How did the news of Verga's death affect you, Mrs. Corrado?"

"I was glad—very glad," she announced simply, and without hesitation.

Walsh, Reynolds and Bourke exchanged glances. Surely this woman was honest!

"If you knew who had killed Verga, you would feel under obligations to that person?"

Teresa nodded.

"But you do not know?"

"No."

"Have you or your husband any other relatives in this country, besides Angelo and Luigi?"

"No—none at all."

"I've been over all this ground pretty thoroughly, Mr. Reynolds," interrupted Bourke, who sat next to Corrado, puffing a black cigar. "All we need to establish is the fact that these people were where they say at eleven o'clock last night, and we can let 'em go."

"But," interrupted Chief Walsh, "how about the ownership of—" and then hesitated at a significant glance from Bourke. "Of—of the stiletto," he concluded rather lamely.

"Yes, Mr. Zarco," resumed Reynolds. "As I undersand it, the black dagger has always been left behind with the body to indicate the vendetta has again been satisfied. The stiletto has been in your possession since the death of your brother Mario. How did the assassin get it?"

Luigi shrugged his shoulders.

"Who can say?" he commented. "I have had no opportunity to even look in my old trunk to see whether or not it is still there. It was an unpleasant sight to me, so I put it away. In a long, narrow box it was kept, at the bottom of my trunk.

"Unlike my relatives, I am displeased at Verga's death. I am an American!"

The last words were uttered with so nice a sense of the dramatic that they really impressed Walsh, Bourke and Reynolds.

The door opened and Officer Bingham entered, and saluted the chief.

"You sent for me, sir?"

"Yes, Bingham. What time did you go off duty last night?"

"Ten-thirty, sir."

"Then you stopped at Zarco's office. Why?"

"I've been a doing it for years, whenever I found the boys there of a night."

"What do you do there?"

"Sit and chat with them."

"Is that all?"

"I lay aside my coat, badge and helmet, and make meself comfortable. Sometimes I have a sup of wine with them."

"How about last night?"

"It was like that last night, sir. I went in and sat down about twenty-five minutes of eleven. Angelo got out the wine, and we were talkin' politics an' things, when all of a suddint the telephone rang. The boy answered it. Then he calls Luigi. 'It's Antonio,' he says."

"What time was this, Bingham?"

"About quarter of eleven, I should say, sir."

"Then what?"

"Oh, then they talked over the phone for a long time; so long that I paid little attention to what was said, and started kiddin' Angelo. After quite a bit of talkin' Luigi hung up the receiver and joined us again.

"He pulled out a big silver watch, looked at it and said, 'Corrado is a fool. The idea of talking over the telephone for half-an-hour. My ear aches with his foolish talk.'"

"Fool?" shouted Antonio at Luigi, interrupting Bingham's recital. "Did you not talk as much as I? You would not dare call me that to my face!"

"Sh, boys, don't quarrel," pacified Walsh, who with Reynolds seemed impressed by Corrado's quick resentment when he heard Bingham's account of Luigi's conversation.

"What time did you leave Zarco's office, Bingham?" quizzed Reynolds.

"About half past eleven, sir, when they turned out the lights and locked up."

Bourke's derby slipped to the floor and rolled close to Corrado's chair. Antonio recovered it and returned it to him. Bourke thanked him, then bent over and apparently picked up a yellow pencil from the floor.

"You drop this?" he inquired casually of Corrado.

"Yes," smiled Antonio, extending his hand for it, after searching in his vest-pocket.

"Oh, you did?" remarked Bourke, dryly. "Then you'll be interested to know that I found it this morning beside the body of Alfredo Verga!"

"Good boy, Eddie," commended Walsh, with a satisfied smile, while even Reynolds lost his accustomed serenity at the unexpected disclosure. As for Bingham, that worthy's eyes were ready to pop from his head.

Neither Corrado nor his relatives showed any concern, however.

"There is some mistake," smiled Antonio suavely, gazing fixedly at the pencil which Bourke still retained. "Now that I look again, I see that it is shorter and older than the one I carried in my vest-pocket."

"Too late, Tony," grinned the chief. "We've got you!"

"Surely there is a mistake," insisted Corrado. "Have I not shown how I spent my time last night?"

"Pretty nearly—but not quite."

"But," protested the sleek Sicilian aggrievedly, "is there no way by which my words may be verified?"

"Yes, there is," interrupted Bourke, rising and picking up his hat. "Hold on to these people for an hour. 'I'm going to borrow the chief's machine.'"

"Where are you going?" inquired Walsh.

"To the Telephone Building at Harkness," shouted Bourke over his shoulder, as he hurried out of the room.

It doesn't seem quite the thing to jump six miles to Harkness and turn the clock

back sixteen hours, and it wouldn't have to be done if it were not for Mary Reilly. Mary—the pert, pretty little "Hello" girl who found telephone operating irksome, especially night operating, and who was constantly rebelling against the strict discipline of the central office.

About 1.00 A.M. the supervisor stopped behind Mary's position at the switchboard. There was practically no traffic, and Mary was engaged in giving Lottie Gray at the next position her opinion on telephone operating in general, and night operating at the Harkness toll board in particular.

"Miss Reilly, this is the third time I've had to warn you about talking this evening," rebuked the supervisor, depositing a package of two hundred tickets before Mary, and a similar one before Miss Gray. "You girls had better sort these tickets, instead."

The supervisor discreetly returned to her desk.

"She's an old crab," muttered Mary to her companion. "I'm gonna quit this job Saturday night and go to Boston."

Lottie did not reply, but busied herself with the tickets, and finally Mary also turned her attention to the long, narrow strips of coarse white paper. She approached the work of sorting the tickets by central offices and then by telephone numbers with more vim than good grace, however, and presently her energetic manner caused a ticket to flutter to the floor.

Down from the high stool slid Mary, and recovered the ticket. Regaining her position, she examined it, and was about to include it in a small pile on the board before her, when a name on the ticket arrested her attention.

"Antonio Corrado," she read slowly. "Gosh, that's the good-natured Eytalian who gave me this bracelet! Lottie, just to show I'm no piker I'm gonna"—here she grasped the ticket with both thumbs and first fingers—"put the kibosh on it!" And with that she tore it in half and then into small bits.

"You'll lose your job," warned Lottie.

"I should worry. Didn't I tell you I was gonna quit Saturday? Now I've done Tony a good turn. That ticket was for a

twenty-nine minute call to Hampton City, and he won't have to pay for it!"

It was more than two hours after Bourke had started for Harkness that he returned and entered Reynold's office. The four suspects had been removed to a witness-room. Reynolds was alone.

"What luck, Ed?" he asked.

Bourke threw an unsealed envelope on the desk. Reynolds removed the note it contained. It read:

Chief E. J. Walsh, Police Department,
Hampton City.

A careful review of our toll records fails to in-

dicate that a call for Hampton 407-W, or in fact, any call, originated at the telephone of Antonio Corrado last night or early this morning.

Yours truly,

A. H. THOMAS, Special Agent.

The Harkness and Hampton

Telephone Company.

"H-m. I guess you've got your man now," was Prosecutor Reynold's only comment.

"I sure have," asserted Bourke, positively. "He must have had some one else call Zarco up from another telephone. But for a few minutes it looked as though he had a damned good alibi, with a policeman to prove it for him!"



THE LAND OF BEGINNING AGAIN

BY LILIAN BELL

OVER the rim of the Hill of Hope
Lies the Land of Beginning Again,
And striving to climb its beckoning slope
Are millions of women and men.

These are the people who forward face,
Undaunted by fear or by lack.
They never feel that they've lost their place—
They only know how to come back!

Failure and grief, slow death and disaster,
Poverty, hunger, or sin,
Spur on the dauntless just to go faster,
Driven by forces within.

If they are weary, nobody knows it;
Discouraged, they don't let it out;
If they're unhappy, not one of them shows it—
Climbers worth talking about!

Over the rim of the Hill of Hope
Lies the Land of Beginning Again;
And thanks be to God! on its beckoning slope
Are millions of women and men!

Elope If You Must

by E. J. Rath

Author of "The Grouch," "Too Many Crooks," "When the Devil Was Sick," etc.

CHAPTER XIX.

NOBODY BUT NANCY.

NANCY alighted first when the cab reached the Dennison house. "Pretty quiet looking, I should say," she thought as she studied the dark exterior.

Willy was the next to emerge upon the sidewalk, and then Hugh. Willy started immediately for the front steps, but a long and sinewy arm restrained him.

"Wait till I pay the driver," advised Hugh. "We're going to have an even start on this business. You ought to be glad we're going to let you into the house at all."

Willy submitted sullenly to detention, while Hugh passed his money to Nancy and asked her to settle the bill. She had just added a tip that made her feel wealthy when a fourth figure joined the group on the pavement and sidled up to her.

"Psst! Nance!"

The whisper was low, but so penetrating that it startled her.

"Well, good God! Jazz Hennessy!"

"Uhuh! Listen. I got a lot—"

Nancy seized him by the coat-lapels and shook him.

"Anything that was ever on between you and me is all off," she rasped. "All off! You're worse than a dead loss. You've thrown me down. You've finished any chance I ever had. Get away from here before I have Mr. Hugh kill you!"

"Ssh! Listen, now. Y' don't understand at all. I got big stuff. Big doin's, Nance."

"Get away from me. I'm going into the house."

She gave him a violent thrust, but Jazz came back spiritedly and clutched her arm.

"Nance, you gotta listen. You gotta know somethin' before you go in. Lemme whisper: *She's in there!*"

"Who?"

"Your boss—Elizabeth."

Nancy gasped and swallowed. Then she wailed:

"Well, that ends it. It's all over. No coin. Jazz Hennessy, if you were decent you'd die in your tracks."

"Wait, now. Wait, Nance. You ain't got it all yet. Elizabeth's home; but everybody else is out."

Nancy sent a swift glance in the direction of Willy Weems, standing a few feet distant, with Hugh mounting guard. She did not believe either of them had heard. Seizing Jazz by the sleeve, she led him further away.

"What's that?" she demanded. "Say it quick—and low."

"The whole family's out. They went out before she got home."

"Who told you?"

"Nobody had to tell me. It was *me* who sent 'em out."

Nancy shook her head and blinked her eyes.

"Where did they go?" she demanded.

"Stamford."

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for February 14.

"Stamford!"

"You said it. Now, listen. This is big stuff. This is what gets the money. And, say, when I tell you what I done—"

"If you've got the goods you don't need to advertise 'em," Nancy interrupted sharply. "Now shoot 'em."

Jazz shot them.

There are times when it does not pay to be too incredulous. Nancy was always skeptical when Jazz told her anything, particularly when it concerned his own acumen and prowess. She could hardly believe her ears. And yet—

Being Nancy, she threw her arms around his neck and hugged him until he was in danger of strangling.

"Oh, you dream!" she whispered. "Oh, you baby boy! Didn't I know you had it in you? Didn't I always say you had a wise bean? Jazz, you're a prince. You're a king among men!"

"Oh, I don't know," said Jazz carelessly, as he recovered his breath. "Cheese, Nance; I ain't no lost child. They're pipin' us."

Nancy released him, took a fresh grip on herself, and prepared for business.

"Come in with us, Jazz," she commanded. "And don't say a word to anybody. Keep whispering to yourself: 'My motto is, *Don't spill the beans!*'"

She rejoined her companions of the taxi and, followed by Jazz, led the way up the steps. Nancy had a latch-key of her own and brought it into play as soon as she reached the vestibule. With a finger at her lips she enjoined silence on everybody as they entered the house. Even Willy Weems was disposed to obey orders as he found himself in the half-lighted hall.

She motioned Hugh and Willy to step into the front room, then whispered to Jazz:

"Stay here in the hall until I come down. There's something I've got to find out."

At the bottom of the staircase her foot touched something. She stooped and picked up a pair of pumps that she recognized as the property of Elizabeth. Smiling, she tucked them under her arm and went softly up-stairs.

Once more she was in command of her emotions. Out on the sidewalk she had

yielded to an explosion of enthusiasm. She had given the devil his due, and she had no regrets, for she was proud of him. But all her caution had returned, and now she was on an errand of verification. Before matters went any further she wanted to make sure that Jazz's story contained no flaws.

She went softly along the second floor hall to Mrs. Dennison's room, found the door open, slipped inside, turned a light-switch and made a reconnoissance. Mrs. Dennison was not there, and she saw signs of a hasty departure.

Then she stole toward the rear of the house, to make sure concerning Uncle William. In doing so she passed Elizabeth's door, beneath which she could see a thin line of light. She listened for an instant, but heard nothing. A moment later she had confirmed the fact that Uncle William was not in his room.

Back at the head of the staircase she paused for thought, but she did not spend much time over it. Her brain was working smoothly again and, like a gasoline-motor, it was most efficient at high speeds. Jazz was waiting in the lower hall as she descended. She led him out into the vestibule, where they would be beyond ear-shot of Hugh and Willy, who sat in the front room, watching each other.

She gave Jazz a briefly whispered instruction.

"And get on the job at once," she added.

"But what's the idea?" he demanded.

"What's the sense of doin' that?"

"Don't ask questions. Do as I say."

"But listen, Nance. Suppose the party should say no?"

Nancy pinched his arm viciously.

"Jazz Hennessy, will you do what I say? This is your last chance to make good. I'm a fool to trust you after the way you've messed everything all day long. If I could send anybody else I wouldn't be sending you. I expect you'll bungle it. There's just one chance in a million that you'll manage it.

"For Heaven's sake, don't *think* about it. Once you start thinking you're gone. You haven't got any thinking facilities. All you want to do is to remember what I tell

you, and do that. Have I got to write it down? Isn't there anything but fat inside your skull?"

Jazz felt that he was justified in taking offense.

"Aw, Nance. Only a couple o' minutes back you said I was a king among men."

"Did I? Well, I stand by it. Think it over, if you can manage it. Just figure where a king classes up nowadays. Maybe you think being called a king is a bouquet, but everybody else knows it's a tin wreath, warranted to stand the weather. Beat it, now; bring back that party here as quick as you can, and don't take no for an answer."

"Slip me a ten-spot."

"What? Broke again? Here! You're getting so you have no sense of shame about it. Hustle now, you bonehead. And remember—if you don't come through on this—curtains."

Jazz skipped briskly down the steps, fondling his ten-spot, and Nancy went back into the house.

"That's the worst of men," she muttered. "Once let 'em get an idea that they've done pretty fair and they start swelling. Don't know how I ever came to make such a break with Jazz. A couple more like that and I'll have him coming down out of control."

She went into the front room and nodded to Willy Weems.

"I'll ask you to step back into the library for a while," she said. "I want to talk to Mr. Holt."

Willy arose stiffly.

"Have you informed Mrs. Dennison that I wish to see her?" he asked.

"You'll see Mrs. Dennison in due time. The least you can do, after waking a lady up, is to give her a chance to put on her clothes. Back to the library, please."

"I don't trust you," grumbled Willy as he started.

"I don't blame you," said Nancy. "I can hardly trust myself when you're around. I'm a regular cat, Mr. Willy Weems, and I'm death on mice."

She followed him to the threshold of the library and closed the sliding-doors after him. If there had been a lock she would have put it to use.

"Mr. Hugh," she said, hurrying toward

him, "that Jazz of mine is a wonder. He's pulled a big stunt. Miss Elizabeth's home and the rest of the family is on the loose, hunting for her."

Hugh opened his eyes. He suppressed any comment as Nancy swiftly reviewed the facts.

"I haven't got it all worked out yet," she added. "I haven't talked to Miss Elizabeth. I can't tell just what to do until I see her."

"Perhaps I'd better talk to her, Nancy."

She shook her head emphatically.

"Not yet. She doesn't want to see you until Willy has reached his finish. We've got to attend to one thing at a time. The trouble with you and Miss Elizabeth is the way you quarrel all the time. I don't see why two people can't get along like Jazz and I do."

He smiled.

"Now, don't let Willy know what's happened," she cautioned. "And whatever you do, don't start any cave stuff unless I give you the office. If there's any need for war-clubs and stone-hammers I'll tell you. If I can marry you to Miss Elizabeth without breaking the furniture I'm going to do it."

"If I can't, then you can begin hauling her around by the hair, but not before. I'm going to have a talk with her now."

There was a movement of the sliding-doors, and a palpably suspicious Willy Weems made his appearance.

"You said we were all to see Mrs. Dennison together," he reminded Hugh. "I'm going to insist on my rights."

"Don't insist on 'em," advised Nancy. "If we should decide to give you your rights you'd be in a bad fix."

"Don't get the idea you can intimidate me. I don't care what kind of a criminal record you've got, I won't let you put anything over on me. I notice you seem to have a set of skeleton-keys that lets you into any place you want to go."

"Why, you dear old fish," exclaimed Nancy, "this is the place where I live. I'm Miss Elizabeth's maid."

Willy flushed like an angry child. He felt that he had been vulgarly tricked.

"I didn't know that I had been submit-

ting to the tyranny of a common servant," he said.

Nancy hoisted danger signals, and it was Hugh's turn to intervene.

"Weems, hereafter if you don't speak respectfully to this lady, I'll give you a spanking that you'll remember indefinitely, and we'll have the family present during the performance. This lady is my friend, and I notify you to bear it in mind."

Nancy thanked her partner with a glance and left them.

"Just the same," protested Willy, "this isn't square. She'll go up-stairs and see Mrs. Dennison first, and she'll give her a wrong idea about everything. If one of us goes up, we all ought to go up."

"Go where? To Mrs. Dennison's bedroom?"

"Well—not exactly. I don't mean that. Only it isn't fair—"

"Oh, don't talk to me," said Hugh. "Here—amuse yourself." He tossed a package of cigarettes across the room.

"But I want to know where you get in on this. If Elizabeth Dennison wants to marry me, what business is it of yours?"

"Perhaps it's my business if Miss Dennison starts out to marry you and then disappears. Certainly it will be the business of the police. I think it quite likely they'll ask you a lot of questions."

Willy sniffed contemptuously to cover the uneasiness of his spirit. It had not occurred to him that the disappearance of Elizabeth might be laid at his own door.

Up-stairs again, Nancy did not content herself with stopping at the second floor, but went to the third. She wanted to make sure concerning the whereabouts of the cook and the chambermaid. It did not take her long to determine that they had already retired. As for Simpson, the butler, she felt sure that he must have gone away with Mrs. Dennison and Uncle William. Having satisfied herself that the house was quiet for the night, she returned to the second floor and went to Elizabeth's door.

"I must keep cool," she cautioned herself. "It's probably going to be a battle."

She tried the knob softly and learned that the door was locked. Then she tapped lightly with her knuckles. When there had

been no response after a short wait she tapped again. This time she heard Elizabeth moving toward the door.

"Mother," said a voice from within, "I'm perfectly all right, but I can't talk to you to-night. Please go away."

Nancy tapped once more.

"It's no use, mother. I won't open the door. I'll tell you all about it in the morning. You may as well go back to your room, because I won't say a word to-night."

Elizabeth was heard moving away from the door. Nancy waited for a short time, then knocked more loudly. Following this the voice from within became impatient.

"Uncle William, you can go away, too. I won't talk to either one of you until tomorrow. You needn't stand there. I'm going to bed, and the best thing both of you can do is to leave me alone."

"Scared but stubborn," was Nancy's silent verdict. "I wonder if she'll let me in."

This time she pounded vigorously and called out:

"Nobody here but Nancy. Open up."

A muffled exclamation was not wholly intercepted by the door that intervened.

"Nobody but *you*?" said the voice of Elizabeth.

"Nobody but me. And it's important."

The key turned in the lock and the door opened on a crack. Nancy promptly pushed her way into the room.

CHAPTER XX.

NANCY CLEARS THE WAY.

ELIZABETH was in a silken kimono, and her hair was down, but she did not look comfortable. Her color began to rise as she beheld Nancy, who had carefully closed the door and turned the key.

"It is too late for you to try to explain anything," said Elizabeth, in a cold voice. "Why did you come to my room?"

"I just dropped in to comb your hair," answered Nancy, as she removed her coat and laid it on the bed, together with her hat.

"I don't wish it. In fact, I have no further use for your services."

"Why, what's wrong, Miss Elizabeth?"

"I don't like traitors."

"Is that meant for me?"

"You know perfectly well."

"Why am I a traitor?"

"Because you let me think you were my friend, trying to help me, and all the time you were playing a double game. It was detestable."

"Oh, but I am your friend," said Nancy. "I wouldn't do a thing against your interests, Miss Elizabeth."

"Please leave my room."

Nancy shook her head.

"Do you intend to go?"

"Not yet."

"Do you want me to put you out—by force?"

Nancy knew that it was physically possible for Elizabeth to do so, but the threat did not alarm her.

"Yes. I want to be put out," she said.

It was an embarrassing challenge. Elizabeth did not care to be forced into an acceptance.

"I have nothing to say to traitors," she observed, turning her back upon Nancy. "I am going to bed."

"All right; go ahead. But as for double-crossing you, I never did."

"You kept me from meeting Mr. Weems, and you tried to make me meet—somebody else."

"Mr. Holt, you mean."

"You will oblige me by not ever mentioning his name in my presence. I did meet him, too, and I found out how fortunate I had been when I sent him out of the house two weeks ago."

"He was arrested for burglary after you met him," remarked Nancy, watching her.

Elizabeth whirled around.

"He's in jail?"

Nancy merely shrugged.

"Of course, I'm—" Elizabeth checked herself. "Well, whatever happened, it was his own fault. He doesn't think I told the police, does he?"

"I don't know what he thinks, Miss Elizabeth."

Elizabeth was very curious concerning the fate of her late prisoner, but she considered that it was beneath her to ask any

further questions. Nancy volunteered nothing more; she decided that it would be more diplomatic to let that phase of the situation rest for the present.

"Talked to your mother yet?" she asked.

"No. I—I came in after they had gone to bed. Now will you go away? I don't want to talk to anybody."

"What are you going to say to her?"

"That is entirely my own affair. I'm not going to trust *you* with any more of my plans."

"Doesn't seem to me you ever did trust me, Miss Elizabeth. You fooled me in the first place about Mr. Weems, and then you ran away after I went and tried to do you a service—such as finding your marriage license for you."

Elizabeth became curious again.

"I don't believe you ever tried to find it," she declared.

"You might as well. I did more than try—I got it. There it is!"

Nancy withdrew the document from her waist and held it up. As Elizabeth made a rush for it she returned it to its hiding-place.

"Give it to me, Nancy."

"What good is it? You don't expect to marry Mr. Weems, do you?"

"N-no. But I have more right to it than you."

"I'll keep it for a while. If you knew what I went through to get it you'd say I was entitled to keep it."

"I know what you want it for. You're going to show it to my mother. I won't have her see it. I'm going to destroy it. Give it to me!"

Nancy shook her head as she patted her waist into shape.

"Why destroy it when you might want to use it?" she asked.

"I shall never use it. Don't dare suggest such a thing."

"You may change your mind about that, Miss Elizabeth."

"I tell you no."

"But wait a minute. Think it over," advised Nancy. "Let me comb your hair for you. No? Well, anyhow, think about what you're going to say to your mother. You don't want her to know anything about a marriage license. All very well. But

how are you going to prevent her from finding out?

"You've got to tell her some kind of a story about why you ran away. Remember, you were out all last night, and you were gone all this day. How are you going to explain if you don't tell the truth? It'll take a mighty straight story to explain things. And your Uncle William is a wise old bird. He's apt to do some investigating. Leave it to a man to be nosy. Seems to me you're due to tell the truth, Miss Elizabeth."

"But I just can't! Do you suppose a girl with any self-respect will deliberately go and tell people that she has been jilted?"

"But suppose you haven't been jilted?"

Elizabeth turned upon her with a curious stare.

"Just what do you mean by that?" she demanded.

"Well, I heard that Mr. Weems had been trying to get another license in Jersey City," remarked Nancy, watching closely for effects.

"Did you? It seems that you have a thorough spy system. Well, suppose he did try? How do I know that it had anything to do with me?"

"But I have an idea that it did. So perhaps you're not jilted after all."

Elizabeth, who had perched herself on the edge of the bed, arose and walked across the room, then back again.

"It would make no difference," she said. "How could I marry him after the way he has treated me?"

"Suppose he never intended to jilt you, Miss Elizabeth. Suppose he's just been running into hard luck."

"I don't wish to hear any excuses for him."

"Oh, I'll admit he may have been to blame," said Nancy. "But one mistake doesn't put a man out, does it? And, besides, it seems to me it might be a good deal easier to get married than it would be to explain that you had been jilted. That's the way I'd feel about it myself."

Elizabeth conceded to herself that there was a certain wisdom in this. She felt that she would do almost anything to save her pride.

Yet when it came to marrying Wilber-

force Weems, the relish of elopement was no longer so keen. Adventure was coming to have a flat taste. It was, of course, better to be a runaway bride than a cast-off candidate; but it was no longer easy to figure Willy in the combination.

"No," said Elizabeth slowly, "I don't care to hear excuses for him. I don't think I shall marry."

"But I think you ought to," persisted Nancy. "I know I wouldn't let anybody have the laugh on me. Not that I mean your mother would laugh; but other people would. You can't keep things like this a secret forever."

Elizabeth was puzzled. She did not understand this attitude on the part of Nancy. It seemed like a reversal of so much that had gone before. It suggested that Nancy was not only a traitor to her mistress, but to everybody else.

"I have decided not to marry Mr. Weems," she said.

That did not suit Nancy in the least degree. She did not want Willy Weems renounced in this fashion. She had another course in mind, something that would be more decisive in its results.

The time had passed to fight for a draw; she proposed to reach a settlement that would be irrevocable. But she did not feel that the hour had come to lay her cards face up on the table. So long as Elizabeth was in ignorance of certain things, such as the absence of the family, for instance, Nancy felt that the command still lay with herself. Besides, she could afford to do some plotting now, for the ten-thousand-dollar prize was again in the foreground.

"I can't help but feel," said Nancy, "that in turning down Mr. Weems like that you're acting hastily. Now, suppose he— Wait, now; let me comb your hair, Miss Elizabeth."

Elizabeth had seated herself at the dresser and was staring moodily at her image.

"No. I don't want it combed."

"It'll make you feel better, Miss Elizabeth."

She was already standing behind her mistress, lifting a heavy handful of blond hair.

"No. Let it alone."

Nancy reached for the comb and went to work. She liked to dress Elizabeth's hair, it was beautiful and smooth and pleasant to feel. And Elizabeth liked to have it combed.

"What I was going to say," resumed Nancy, "was: suppose he still wanted to marry you and could explain everything satisfactorily."

"How can a man want to marry me after the way he has behaved? Nancy, the comb is caught; don't pull so."

"Excuse me. My, but your hair is snarled, isn't it? That's because you didn't have me working on it this morning. Well, he might have a perfectly good explanation. Whether he has or not, of course I don't know, Miss Elizabeth. But he ought to have a chance. And I happen to know this, anyhow: he wants a chance."

Elizabeth twisted around on the stool.

"How do you know that?" she demanded.

"Oh, I know. The fact is, I've seen him."

"Where? When? How did you see him? What did he say?"

Nancy improvised.

"Oh, I just happened to meet him. Just an accident. He wants to marry you, all right. He feels very much upset about things. Anybody could see it. He wants to see you, Miss Elizabeth."

But Elizabeth was doubtful again.

"I don't care to see him," she said.

"But suppose he should call at the house."

"Why— Oh, I might have to see him in that case. But you need have no fear; he won't call. Nancy! You're tugging at it awfully."

"Honestly I'm not, Miss Elizabeth. You moved your head. Speaking about his calling here, I just happen to know he's going to."

"Did he tell you so?"

Nancy considered that the time had come to develop the situation a little further. She felt that Elizabeth ought to be ready for it now.

"Miss Elizabeth," she said, "you mustn't get mad or excited about what I'm going

to tell you. I didn't tell you all at once, because I didn't want to startle you. I've been trying to break it easy. I was going to tell you, anyhow, but I waited a little first."

Elizabeth swung around again and seized Nancy by the wrists.

"What's happened?" she demanded. "Tell me at once. I'm not a baby."

"All right. Well, this is it: Mr. Weems is down-stairs now."

Elizabeth stared at her for several seconds, still clinging to her wrists.

"He's down-stairs?" she whispered incredulously. "You know that?"

"We came in together," said Nancy.

"Why—why didn't you tell me in the first place?"

"I told you, Miss Elizabeth. I wanted to get you prepared for it. He's waiting in the library."

Elizabeth turned back to the dresser, rested her elbows, supported her chin and spent half a minute in thought. The news that Willy Weems still pursued and wished to make amends for all his omissions did not elate her. It was a comfort to know that she had not been jilted, but beyond that point she experienced no feeling of satisfaction.

"Well, I don't think I'll see him," she said slowly.

If Nancy had not been determined to stage a cataclysmic finish, this answer would have pleased; but now it did not accord with her plans.

"You'll just have to see him, Miss Elizabeth."

"No. I've decided not to see him."

"But listen. He came here—"

Elizabeth shook her head irritably.

"I won't see him."

"Miss Elizabeth, you've got to listen. Mr. Weems isn't really here to see you. He wants to see your mother."

"What!"

"Just that. When we came here we didn't know you were home. Mr. Weems was so worried about what might have happened to you that he wanted to see your mother. He wants to explain everything to her."

"I came up-stairs to get her, and then I

found you were in. Then, of course, I figured you ought to have a chance to see him first."

"Oh, dear! What am I going to do?"

"Why, you've got to see him; that's all. Don't you understand? If you don't see him he'll insist on seeing your mother and telling her all about everything. And you don't want that to happen, do you?"

"No-o. But—"

"He'll sit there until he sees somebody."

"It's abominable," said Elizabeth. "Why did he insist on coming here?"

"Search me, Miss Elizabeth. I couldn't keep him from coming. When I found out he was set on coming, I made up my mind to come with him."

"Go down and send him away."

"He won't go. He's awfully determined."

"Since when has he become determined?" demanded Elizabeth, in frank surprise.

Nancy liked that remark, but she did not say so.

"Oh, I don't know. But he's stubborn. He's going to see your mother, if he can."

"He mustn't see her, Nancy. It's impossible! I won't permit it."

"Then you'll have to see him."

Elizabeth sighed savagely.

"All right. I will see him."

"That's best," said Nancy soothingly. "Now I'll put up your hair. It looks beautiful to-night, Miss Elizabeth. I've got every kink out."

"I don't care how it looks. And pick me out some kind of a dress. I don't care what it is, either."

Of course that was not quite true, for Elizabeth always cared how she looked, being a sane woman. Nancy was at particular pains to see that she looked exceptionally well, but for what reason she did not explain.

"I'm sure he'll give you a good explanation for everything," she said, as she gave Elizabeth a final pat. "Now, you wait here till I go down and see if the coast is clear. We don't want anybody horning in."

"I should say not," declared Elizabeth.

Nancy let herself out of the room and went down-stairs. She found Holt sitting in a small reception-room off the hall. Willy

was back in the library, in a fit of sulky restlessness.

"Listen, Mr. Hugh. Miss Elizabeth's coming down to see Willy. You've got to keep out of sight. They're going to have a talk."

He demurred instantly.

"Where do I come in?" he demanded. "I'm not going to give him a chance to fix things up."

"Ssh, now. He only thinks he's going to meet the old lady, not Miss Elizabeth. All I want that bird to do is to start talking. If we don't give Miss Elizabeth a chance to talk to him she'll always have an idea in her head that maybe he had a good excuse."

"What I'm after is to abolish him for life. And if he doesn't do it himself I've got something else that will."

"Suppose he has a good excuse."

"I'm willing to gamble. Are you?"

"I'd sooner be sure."

"You play along with me. I'm a sure thing gambler. Go into the library, send Willy into the front room and close the doors. Leave the rest of it to me. I'm going good now."

Hugh did as he was bid, but with reluctance. Willy found Nancy waiting for him in the front room.

"She has decided to see you first," announced Nancy. "She'll be right down."

There was a gleam of triumph in Willy's mild eyes. He knew where he stood with Mrs. Dennison. In getting the first chance he believed himself to be enjoying good fortune.

"He's in the parlor," said Nancy, when she rejoined Elizabeth. "All ready?"

"Yes; I'm ready."

Nancy observed the set of her jaw as Elizabeth made a final survey of herself in a mirror. It prompted her to something. She thrust her hand inside her waist and brought forth the license.

"Here, Miss Elizabeth, you'd better keep this now. Besides, Mr. Weems may want to look it over."

Elizabeth hesitated, then took it.

"Come down with me, Nancy," she said. "And stay in the room with me."

Nancy's heart gave an extra beat for sheer joy. Nothing could have suited her

better. She was curious to know what sort of explanation Willy Weems was going to make. She had figured, of course, upon eavesdropping; but Elizabeth's invitation spared her the risk and the trouble of that.

"Now, if Jazz doesn't fail me," Nancy told herself, "we'll all have a lovely time."

CHAPTER XXI.

FACE TO FACE—TWICE.

"FACE to face at last!"

No, reader; the words were not spoken. Nancy, however, was whispering them in the silences of her thoughts. Had she been writing titles for the movies those were exactly the words she would have used to introduce the scene in the Dennison parlor. Her sense of drama was acute, and she felt that the meeting between Elizabeth and Willy Weems called for dramatic words.

As Nancy entered the room she stepped immediately away from the doorway and took a stand with her back against the wall, so as to be outside the picture, and yet in a position to view everything in it. Elizabeth paused just inside the doorway, her tall figure framed by the opening in the portières.

Never had she been more stately. She suggested Nemesis without exactly expressing it. Ordinarily Elizabeth's lower lip fashioned itself in a rather attractive pout, without the smallest hint of petulance. But now it had narrowed in the center and formed a nearly straight line. Nancy considered that the change boded well for a satisfactory interview.

As for Willy, he was too much surprised to convey an impression of anything else. He stood near the center of the room, his mouth slightly open, his arms hanging slack, his eyes blinking rapidly.

"Why—Elizabeth!"

"Well?"

Elizabeth's voice was clear and placid; it was not exactly a freezing voice, but was at a temperature of, say, about thirty-five degrees, Fahrenheit.

Nancy was disappointed. She expected something volcanic, with molten lava, hot

ashes and blistering blasts. She hoped that Elizabeth would say the very words she had in mind for a screen title. But if danger was abroad, it was still potential; that was evident. Yet for all her calm, Elizabeth did not look peaceful.

"Why, Elizabeth!" repeated Willy. "I—why, I expected your mother."

"I believe so. I think, however, that I am entitled to the first word."

"I— Why, of course. Certainly you are. But—" He flashed Nancy a look of reproach. "I had no idea you were home."

Willy was trying to reorganize himself to meet a surprise. He was obviously unready for Elizabeth, and all his preparation for Mrs. Dennison was for naught.

"Well?" repeated Elizabeth.

Willy suddenly rushed forward and tried to seize her hands. Elizabeth put them behind her back, but did not retreat. He retreated a pace, confused. Then he glanced at Nancy again.

"Elizabeth, you can't tell how overjoyed I am!" he exclaimed. "I was so worried about you. I searched everywhere. I was nearly mad when I couldn't find you. Elizabeth—dear—"

Again he looked at Nancy, who was immobile but not unobservant.

"Elizabeth—I— Will you please ask your maid to leave?"

Elizabeth shook her head gently and her glance met Nancy's. Nancy somehow interpreted the glance as a cue, for she spoke promptly.

"Miss Elizabeth wishes me to stay—and she does not want you to call her 'dear.'"

Willy swallowed and twiddled his fingers, then made an effort to square his shoulders, which were not meant for such a pose.

"Where in the world have you been, Elizabeth? I hunted and hunted, and tried every possible way to find you. But you seemed to have vanished. I can't begin to tell you how alarmed I have been. And I can't tell you how relieved I am to find you safe."

Elizabeth seemed to grow slightly taller. Her height was about equal to Willy's, so that she always looked the taller of the two. Now she actually dwarfed him.

"Where I have been is not important,"

she said. "But if you wish to tell me where you have been, I will listen."

Her words did not warm Willy.

"Of course, Elizabeth; certainly. Er—you are entitled to know where I have been. Most assuredly you are."

"Thank you. Well?"

"Well, I—I suppose I ought to begin by explaining why I—ah—was unavoidably detained—er—last night."

"I think," said Elizabeth, "that would be a good beginning."

Willy found a handkerchief and carefully wiped his forehead. Then he glanced at his watch, not because he was interested in the time, but for the sake of something to do. It was so much easier to make commonplace motions than it was to speak simple words.

"It was, of course, inexcusable for me not to have been there," he began. "Things like that are awfully hard to explain; it's so hard to make other people see them in exactly the right light. And yet, what I am going to tell you, Elizabeth, is absolutely true; absolutely."

"You are very kind."

"I wouldn't think of lying to you, even to excuse myself. Not for an instant." His voice was pathetically anxious. "I hope I am going to be able to make you understand, Elizabeth."

"I hope so. I understand English moderately well. I am waiting, Mr. Weenas."

"You—you called me 'Willy' once."

Elizabeth made no answer to that; she felt it was unnecessary.

"Please call me 'Willy.'"

Nancy decided that it would not be amiss to cut in.

"Miss Elizabeth is waiting for you to spiel," she said, tartly. "If you can't start until somebody calls you 'Willy,' I suppose I'll have to be it. Shoot the works, Willy."

She realized that it was undignified, and that perhaps Elizabeth would administer a rebuke. But she was wildly curious to know why Willy had failed to elope, and she wanted to hasten the tale. Willy looked at Elizabeth as though he expected her to protect him from the mad woman, but Elizabeth remained silent. He coughed and began again.

"Well, you see, when a chap gets married

he always wants to say good-by to his friends. That is—oh, wait, please. I didn't mean exactly that. Of course, he doesn't give up his friends. And yet— Well, he does give up some of them, maybe.

"You understand how it is. Bachelor dinners. Little farewell parties. Things like that. It's quite the regular thing, Elizabeth. That's what I'm trying to get at."

He paused and seemed to be waiting for a sign of encouragement, but none came. Yet it was all too plain that he had the exclusive right to the floor. Never did he want it less.

"So, night before last, there was a little farewell party. I didn't want it, you understand. Honestly, Elizabeth. But a fellow can't dodge those things. You know how his friends are; they simply won't hear of it.

"So we had this—er—party. It was—well, it was down on Long Island. Automobiles, you know, and things like that. Very unfortunate; I didn't want it at all. But you know—a fellow has to break off with the old life. That's what the party was for. I was breaking off. You understand, don't you, Elizabeth?"

"Perfectly."

"I knew you would. Well, the party got started very late. That meant it kept up very late. I was against it; I protested. But what could I do? A chap can't insult his friends, particularly when he'll never see—when he's going to get married. But finally we did get started back.

"The automobile I was in got separated. Chauffeur got lost; didn't know the roads. You know how it is. Wound up somewhere in the woods. First thing you know we were in a mud-hole. Couldn't get out at all. Ever hear of such luck?"

If Elizabeth had, she made no sign. Willy went on, hastily.

"Well, we just waited there. Long past breakfast time, you know; oh, long past. Finally had to send the chauffeur to hunt somebody up. He had to walk somewhere. I don't know where; he didn't know. Just walked, you understand.

"Elizabeth, he was gone for three hours! Oh, absolutely. Three hours, or perhaps four. How could I help it? Came back

finally with a man and a team. We got pulled out. And then—I'm asking you to believe this, Elizabeth—we got lost again. Awfully stupid chauffeur.

"Well, anyhow, that was the way it went. Do you know what time we got back to New York? It was nearly five o'clock in the afternoon! Yes, Elizabeth. Five o'clock!"

Willy stopped for breath and to wipe his forehead again.

"Five o'clock and I was to be married that evening! Hadn't had a wink of sleep, mind you. Not a wink. You know how those farewell parties are. What could I do? Had to get some rest; had to get freshened up. Why, I was absolutely unrepresentable, Elizabeth.

"So, I—well, I went to a Turkish bath. Little bath; little sleep; then I'd be all right. I was anxious, Elizabeth; I was thinking about you all the time. You understand that?"

"So far I understand every word," said Elizabeth.

"I knew you would. I'm telling it all, Elizabeth; everything. I want you to get the whole thing straight. Well, anyhow, I had to go to a Turkish bath. After six o'clock, you know, when I got there. And we were due to be married that very evening, at eleven. Awful situation, Elizabeth; awful. Never felt so angry at myself.

"Let's see. Where— Oh, yes. I took a Turkish bath. Great things to brace a man up. And you know how those baths are; always want to take a little nap afterwards. I hadn't had any sleep, you understand; not a particle."

Willy halted again; his voice was becoming tremulous. There was a wild, unspoken appeal for understanding in the look that he gave Elizabeth, but she did not appear to notice it.

"So I took a nap. I left a call, Elizabeth. Absolutely I did. But—"

His eyes looked out from an agonized soul.

"But—"

Elizabeth was waiting patiently.

"Ah, Elizabeth! You just *must* understand this part of it. Remember how it was: up all night; very tired; all worried

and upset. Why, I was almost in a state of collapse, Elizabeth!"

Willy moistened his lips.

"So I took a nap. But—"

His voice faded away to a whisper; he was drooping and abject.

Nancy waited until her patience expired.

"What you mean is, *you overslept!*" she exclaimed.

Willy nodded faintly.

"Well, I'll be damned!" said Nancy.

Elizabeth had not moved.

"Overslept his wedding!" cried Nancy.

"Pounding his ear in a souse joint while his bride was eloping all by herself! Well, I've heard all kinds of excuses for all kinds of things, but this bird wins in a walk. He just breezes in."

"I've told the truth," said Willy, with a sudden flash of defiance.

"Sure you have," declared Nancy. "I believe every word of it. So does Miss Elizabeth. Don't you?"

Elizabeth made no answer. She was too completely given over to scorn and contempt. The creature had overslept!

"Every word of it's true," reiterated Willy. "I'm entitled to that much credit."

"Why, you're entitled to the thanks of Congress," said Nancy. "So is any guy who can whistle a tune in the hay while the parson waits. I'll say you're good, Willy. I'll say you're great."

"Let's have the rest of it, now. Begin where you overslept."

Willy favored her with a vicious glance, then addressed himself again to Elizabeth.

"It isn't fair for you to allow your servant to insult me, Elizabeth. But I suppose I must endure it. Of course, you understand I'm awfully ashamed of myself. But I'm telling everything. That's always going to be my policy, Elizabeth; I'm never going to keep anything from you."

"Well, I overslept. They never called me; it wasn't my fault. I—I never woke up until five o'clock the next morning!"

His voice had risen almost to a shriek.

"Five o'clock, Elizabeth! What could I do then? I was nearly wild. I couldn't call you up on the phone at five o'clock. I didn't know what to do. I—I'm afraid I got rattled. Any fellow would in my place.

But I wasn't deserting you, Elizabeth. Not a bit of it.

"After I finally got things straightened out in my mind I went to the Belvedere Grand. But there seemed to be some trouble there. I couldn't get in. Nobody could get in. After a while I tried telephoning, but I couldn't get any satisfaction. I couldn't find out anything.

"I tell you I was worried, Elizabeth; badly worried. I was alarmed for your safety. I didn't know how to find you. But I was trying—trying all the time."

Still Elizabeth did not say a word. The eyes with which she regarded Willy were almost without expression. Nancy was marveling at her calm.

"I tell you, it has been an awful day," said Willy desperately—"terrible. All kinds of things happened. Burglars broke into my office. Burglars broke into my apartment." He glanced significantly at Nancy.

"Why, I believe people have been plotting against me. Somebody has been trying to keep us apart, Elizabeth. Somebody has been trying to wreck our happiness."

He paused so long after this that Nancy thought it advisable to set him going again.

"You might tell us about going to Jersey City," she suggested.

Willy brightened unexpectedly.

"Of course, I'm going to tell you. That'll show you how sincere I am, Elizabeth. You see, after all this trouble I suddenly discovered I didn't have the license. Couldn't find it at all. Thought I must have lost it."

Nancy glanced at Elizabeth.

"Well, I knew when I found you that if I didn't have any license we couldn't get married. Could we? And I couldn't go back to the license office and ask for another one. But I was determined I wouldn't go to you empty-handed, Elizabeth. So I tried to get a license in Jersey City.

"I tried hard. There were—er—legal difficulties. They insisted you'd have to be present. Very embarrassing; rotten sort of a system. But what could I do? I tried my best.

"It proves I was intending to marry you, Elizabeth. You've got to admit that it proves it."

If Elizabeth recognized the validity of the proof she gave no indication of the fact. She seemed frozen into a beautiful statue of disdain.

"So that explains why I went to Jersey City," said Willy. "I was doing my best to marry you all the time, but there was no chance without a license."

"Seems to me," remarked Nancy, "that you're probably telling the truth about that, too. Any boob who'll forget to show up to be married is likely to forget that he left the license with the bride."

Willy sucked his breath through his teeth.

"Why, so I did! Elizabeth, I was so terribly upset I never remembered what I did with the license. Thank Heaven, it's safe."

Elizabeth had been standing with one hand concealed behind her. Now she brought it into view and unclosed it. A crumpled paper rested in the palm. She smoothed out the paper, unfolded it and held it up. Then she slowly tore it to pieces before his eyes.

"Oh, Elizabeth!"

There was panic as well as pain in Willy's voice.

She allowed the torn pieces to flutter to the floor. All this was done with a magnificent calm; a calm that conveyed finality far more impressively than if she had permitted herself to betray anger and excitement.

Willy stood like a stricken creature, gaping.

Nancy alone showed animation; she was trembling with joy. If the furniture had been pushed back she would have turned cartwheels.

"Elizabeth—you can't mean *that*!" cried Willy.

"It is exactly what I mean," said Elizabeth, speaking for the first time in several minutes.

"But, Elizabeth! I'm more anxious to marry you than ever. I'll get another license. I'll—"

"Mr. Weems, you are the lowest living organism I have ever observed. I think there is nothing further for me to say."

"It's cruel of you to speak that way," said Willy, bitterly. "I don't deserve it. I

told you the truth, Elizabeth; I told you exactly the way things happened."

"I have expressed no doubt of your word, Mr. Weems. I believe implicitly that you were enjoying your sleep, while I—" For an instant she seemed about to burst into a storm. "But it's of no consequence. Nancy, please show this organism to the door."

Nancy stepped over to the portières and held one of them back. As she stood there waiting for Willy to move a gentle tapping noise reached her ear. Somebody was at the front door.

She moved quickly across the hall and laid her hand on the knob.

As she did so she could see a face pressed close against the glass panel.

As she opened the door cautiously the voice of Jazz whispered noisily:

"Here we are, Nance. I got the goods."

Jazz sidled in through the half-opened door, followed by a blond and fashionably dressed lady.

"Yep; here we are," said Lottie Lester. "What's the game? If it's one of these all-night parties of Willy's, I'm fed up. I've got to sleep some time."

The summoning of Lottie had been an anchor to windward, cast out by Nancy in case all other means failed. But now she did not need the anchor.

"Why, the party's off," she said, in a low voice. "There was a mistake. I'm sorry."

Lottie surveyed her environment critically.

"Fine time to pull a mistake like that on me," she observed. "I cut the last dance to come around here. Where's Willy?"

"He left," said Nancy.

Lottie looked suspicious. She turned a businesslike glance on Jazz.

"Say, Hennessy, what have you been putting over on me? What do you think I am? What—"

She paused abruptly and turned her head in a listening attitude. From beyond the portières came the sound of a voice.

"Give me another chance, Elizabeth. You're the only person in the whole world that I care anything about!"

Lottie promptly pushed her way past Nancy and walked briskly into the parlor.

"Hello, Willy. How's the headache?"

Let's see the only person in the whole world that you care anything about."

CHAPTER XXII.

LOTTIE LESTER.

THE two women in the parlor surveyed each other. In the eyes of Lottie there was curiosity, followed by calculating study. In the eyes of Elizabeth there was instant recognition. Willy tried to watch both at once, his head bobbing from side to side; he felt as though his skin was shrinking.

"What are *you* doing in my house?" demanded Elizabeth.

"I was sent for," said Lottie, easily. "Who are you, anyhow? Willy, introduce me to her majesty."

Willy tried to speak, but merely gurgled.

"Willy!" said Lottie, sharply. "You going to do as I tell you? What did you bring me here for, anyhow?"

"I—I didn't bring you."

"You sent for me. What's the difference?"

"I never sent for you."

"Oh, you didn't, eh? Well, I'm here. Now, if somebody'll tell me what I'm here for, I'll be tickled pink."

The fact that Lottie Lester was as pretty at close range as she was when seen from a gallery table at Burchell's did not add to Elizabeth's peace of soul. She surveyed the small dancer sternly.

"There has evidently been a mistake," said Elizabeth. "You can do nothing here. I must ask you to go."

What Elizabeth feared most was a noisy scene; it might wake her mother and Uncle William.

"Say, do you know who you're talking to?" demanded Lottie.

"I believe that I do."

"Well, then, you ought to know I ain't the kind that's ordered around. I come pretty near being boss wherever I am. Don't I, Willy?"

"Go—go away," muttered the unfortunate organism.

"I will like hell," observed Lottie, placidly. "I'm not getting myself in Dutch

at Burchell's for nothing. They kicked like a steer when I pulled out of the last show. What's the news, Willy? Who is her majesty?"

But Willy was making a despairing appeal to Elizabeth.

"Honestly, I didn't send for her, Elizabeth. There has been some awful mistake. She doesn't mean anything to me. She's out of my life. She's—"

Lottie had him firmly gripped by one ear.

"Say, when did I drop out of your life, Willy? Listen, son: When I drop I carry a parachute. And I don't mean anything to you, eh?"

She twisted his ear with sinewy fingers and laughed.

"Your majesty," she said, turning to Elizabeth, "I don't just get where you come in on this. But I can see that we don't like each other and we won't waste any time playing at it. Willy, you see, is one of my old, old friends. Aren't you, Willy? Say 'yes.'"

"Let me go," said Willy, furious with pain. "You're nothing to me, I tell you—nothing!"

"That so? Well, you can't call me fickle. I'm something to *you*, old dear. Don't forget that. Why, after the way you pulled me out on a broken-down automobile party—"

"What!" The exclamation was from Elizabeth.

"Sure. Didn't Willy tell you about that your majesty?"

"He said it was—a bachelor party."

Lottie laughed with genuine relish.

"Say, Willy's getting cute." She twisted his ear again. "But he was right at that. Yep; it was a bachelor party. Willy was one bachelor and I was the other. I think the chauffeur is married. Am I right, Willy?"

Willy groaned and finally succeeded in wrenching loose.

"Elizabeth!" he wailed. "Don't you see, I was putting an end to all the old life? I didn't want to go on the party, but I couldn't help it."

"Didn't want to go?" echoed Lottie.

"Listen, Wee Willy Winkums—that's what I call him, your majesty—you'd been both-

ering me for a week to go on the party. Only you didn't say it was a farewell. You didn't have the crust for that. Why the farewell, anyhow?"

"I'm—I'm going to be married," faltered Willy.

"Married? Who to? Her majesty? Oh, all right; go and get married. But get this, Willy: I had breach of promise papers drawn up long ago. The lawyer has 'em in his safe.

"You see, I'm one of those foresighted girls; in our business we have to be. Any time you get married, all I have to do is to serve the papers. By getting 'em ready in advance, we don't lose any time. It's the only safe way, with the courts handling things so slow."

"If he has told you that he is going to marry me he lies," said Elizabeth, her voice rising.

"But, Elizabeth—"

"Leave my house—both of you!"

Elizabeth was towering, like a straight young pine. Her temper was reaching the danger point.

"What's the rush, your majesty?" inquired Lottie, with a drawl. "Let's get things a little plainer. Let's—"

Elizabeth whirled about and glared savagely at Nancy.

"Who admitted this woman to my house? Who dared?"

Nancy, in turn, swung about and confronted Jazz.

"Jazz Hennessy," she demanded, "what do you mean by bringing that woman to this house?"

Jazz listened incredulously.

"Why, Nance! What do I mean by bringin' her here? Why, wasn't I—"

"Don't stand there answering back. How dared you bring her to Miss Elizabeth's house? I never would have dreamed you'd do such a thing. Now, you get her out of here, just as quick as you can. Do you hear me?"

Jazz stood in a bewildered trance. As for Lottie, she curled a lip and patted her golden hair.

"I always go when I'm ready," she said.

"But when I'm not ready, why—"

She did not finish the sentence. It died

half spoken as Elizabeth took a swift step forward and as Lottie took an involuntary step backward.

Nancy had never seen Elizabeth like this before. Her tall figure trembled; her hands were clenched; her eyes were narrowed. She was poised like a great cat, ready to spring. And then she said something of which afterward she had no memory. The words fairly boomed from her lips.

"Somebody get this damned creature out of my house or I'll kill her!"

Lottie's nonchalance left her. Nancy herself was alarmed. She stepped forward quickly, took Lottie by the arm and led her unresisting into the hall.

"You'd better run," she whispered. "I've never seen her this way. If she ever lets loose you'll be crippled for life."

"I'll go; I'll go," said Lottie. "She's crazy, ain't she? Only it ain't a square deal. They'll slap a fine on me at Burchell's and—"

"Here!"

Nancy thrust some of Uncle William's expense money into Lottie's hand, then rushed her to the front door.

"You'd better run fast," she advised. "If she takes a notion—"

"I'm going, I tell you. You don't have to shove me. Where's Willy? You send him—"

"He's going to be busy for a while," said Nancy, ominously. "And you take good care you don't come back here, you—hussy!"

"Say, who are you calling—"

But Lottie was out in the vestibule and Nancy had closed the door, slipping the chain as a double precaution.

Elizabeth was coming out of the parlor.

"It's all right; she's gone, Miss Elizabeth," said Nancy.

"Yes; I heard her go." Elizabeth had control of her voice again. "I am going up-stairs. I do not wish to be disturbed again. I shall leave it to you to see that this person—" She made a gesture toward the parlor. "Have him thrown out of the house—at once."

She walked up-stairs without once turning to look back, entered her room and locked the door.

Nancy found Willy in the parlor, with Jazz inspecting him curiously.

"Oh, I'm going," said Willy. "But I'll see that you and Holt get what's coming to you. And it won't be long coming, either."

Nancy gave no apparent heed to his threat.

"Jazz," she said, "see that this man doesn't stir out of here until I come back. Bean him if he tries, and if you can't hold him, yell for help."

She marched back to the library, entered and closed the door behind her. Hugh Holt was leaning against the table, his arms folded. "I heard about all of it," he said.

"Good. Then I don't have to explain. Now about Willy: Miss Elizabeth wants him thrown out, but I don't think we dare throw him out, Mr. Hugh."

"Why, that's easy."

"Oh, I don't mean it can't be done. What I mean is, Willy has it in for you and me and he'll do anything to make trouble for us. If we turn him loose now he'll go straight to the police, most likely. I wouldn't trust him not to. And we can't afford to be bothered with police now, Mr. Hugh. We haven't got our job finished."

"What's the idea? Keep him here?"

"That's it exactly."

"He'll be a nuisance around, won't he? Somebody 'll have to watch him all the time."

"No. That won't be necessary. We can put him in a safe place, and Miss Elizabeth needn't know a thing about it."

"Where's the place?"

"Well," said Nancy, "we have a nice, dry cellar. There's a couple of little windows in it, but they've got bars across 'em. The back door is locked inside and out, so there isn't a chance for him to break loose. So what do you say we put him there."

"I'm agreeable. How's Elizabeth?"

"Never saw her so grand, Mr. Hugh. She's dangerous, but she's grand. We'll talk about her later. Let's fix Willy now."

They went into the parlor, where Jazz and Willy sat glaring at each other.

"Come," said Nancy, addressing the captive.

"What are you going to do?" demanded Willy, sullenly.

"Going to show you the back way out. You don't want to go out that front door and run into Lottie, do you? I expect she's waiting on the sidewalk."

Willy was quite certain he did not want to meet Lottie.

"Show me the way out," he said.

Nancy led the way to the basement, with Willy following, then Hugh, and then Jazz. She was smiling as she piloted the procession through the lower hall. At the door which led to the cellar she halted.

"You have to go through the cellar in order to reach the back way out," she said. "After you get into the back yard all you have to do is to keep on walking until you reach the back fence, which is clear through on the next street. There is a door in the fence."

"I haven't any hat," said Willy, suddenly remembering.

"You won't need a hat," said Nancy, smiling again.

At the head of the staircase that led to the cellar was an electric switch that controlled the lights below. Nancy turned the switch and opened the door. Willy glanced down and observed that the cellar was well lighted.

"Go ahead," she commanded.

He descended the stairs and found himself in the Dennison cellar. It was a dry, well-kept cellar, and quite roomy.

Nancy, who had remained at the head of the stairs, called down:

"See the door at the rear?"

"Yes; I see it."

"Well, Willy, that's the back way out. I said I'd show it to you. I didn't say I'd open it. Now, you make yourself comfortable and be a good boy."

She switched off the cellar lights.

There was a howl from the darkness below, and, unfortunately, some cursing. Nancy laughed as she closed the door at the top of the stairs, locking and bolting it.

"It's wonderful," she said, "how comfortable you can make things in your own house."

Hugh was grinning.

"Sort of a mean trick, Nancy. Why not let him have the lights, at any rate?"

"He'll do less mischief in the dark, Mr.

Hugh. Don't you go getting sorry for him. Jazz, you stick around down here in the basement and see that he doesn't try to break down the door. Mr. Hugh and I are going up-stairs for a talk."

It was past midnight as they sat in the library, discussing what might be done next. Hugh was for seeing Elizabeth at once. Nancy counseled a little delay; she was sure it was desirable to give Elizabeth an opportunity to cool off.

"It's no time to risk a wreck now, Mr. Hugh. Let's be careful when we can; it's so seldom we get a chance. But don't you get the idea I'm through. I think my money is all right, but that's only part of it."

"We've got to see that Miss Elizabeth elopes, and that's all there is to it. Yes, sir; she absolutely must. I'll tell you how far I'm ready to go: If Miss Elizabeth doesn't marry you I won't take one cent of Uncle William's money!"

"Nonsense, Nancy. Take it if he offers it."

"If he offers it? I'd like to see him hold out on me. But what I said goes, no bride, no money."

He was trying to argue her out of this heroic position when Nancy suddenly cocked her head and made a sign for silence.

"Somebody moving around up-stairs," she whispered. "Maybe it's Miss Elizabeth. Wait here."

She came back after a brief absence.

"Miss Elizabeth is in her room. It's somebody on the third floor. I'm not scared, but maybe you'd better come up with me."

Hugh followed. They went noiselessly along the second floor hall, and then up the staircase to the third floor. At the top they found themselves confronted by a figure in a blue kimono.

"The up-stairs girl," murmured Nancy.

A squeak of surprise came from the blue kimono, and in response to it there appeared from one of the rooms a second figure, white and waddling.

"The cook," whispered Nancy.

Martha, the up-stairs girl, held her ground after the first instant of surprise. She regarded Nancy with suspicion. They had never liked each other.

"What are you two doing up at this hour?" demanded Nancy.

"Same to you," said Martha, pertly. "Who's that man?"

"None of your business. You'd better go back to your rooms."

Martha retreated a couple of paces and whispered to the cook. Then she came back defiantly.

"There's queer doings in this house," she said. "Nellie and me are going to find out about it. We're going to see Mrs. Dennison."

"She's not in," said Nancy.

"Then we're going to see Uncle William."

"He's not in, either. None of them have come back yet."

"Then we're going to telephone to somebody. We've heard people coming in and going out, and we don't like it. Who did you say that man is?"

"I didn't say. And you keep yourself out of my affairs or you'll be sorry," said Nancy. "Go back to your rooms and stay there."

Martha and the cook consulted again.

"No; we won't go back. We're going to search the house."

"Yes," affirmed Nellie. "And we'll call the police if we find anything wrong."

Nancy spent brief seconds in thought. She did not know what damage to her plans might be wrought by a pair of meddling servants. It was out of the question to have them loose about the house.

"If you don't go into your rooms peacefully," she said, "we'll put you in them and lock you there."

"If you do, we'll pound on the floors and holler out the windows," announced Martha, gamely.

"Will you? That settles it, then. The attic for yours."

Nancy made a rush and by the sheer speed of her onset carried the pair of conscientious objectors half-way along the hall.

"Open that door, quick, Mr. Hugh!" she commanded. "The one alongside of me. That's it. Now—up you go!"

The last remark was addressed to Martha.

"I won't. Don't you dare try putting me in the attic."

"Better go," said Nancy, grimly. "This man here is desperate. He's a yegg. He's got a habit of killing people. He—"

There was a smothered exclamation from Nellie, who waited to hear no more, but bolted through the door and up the attic stairs. Nancy pushed Martha after the flying cook, slammed the door and locked it.

"The lock's none too good and I don't trust them, especially Martha," she said. "Let's get some furniture."

They brought a table and some chairs from Nellie's room and erected a barricade.

"There!" said Nancy. "Now let 'em pound on the floors and holler. Nobody'll hear the pounding and the attic hasn't got any windows. Don't you worry about that pair, Mr. Hugh. It's warm in the attic and there's an old bed up there, if they want to sleep. They had no business trying to interfere with us."

"Nancy," remarked Hugh, "I'm beginning to be afraid of you."

"What? Scared of me? Stop kidding, Mr. Hugh. Why, I wouldn't even hurt Willy."

"I ain't half as desperate as you are. I never sent a cop to the hospital. I'm tame. Only I do hate to have people interfering."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the conclusion of this story without waiting a month.

TARZAN RETURNS!

EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS' BIG NEW FIVE-PART SERIAL
TARZAN AND THE VALLEY OF LUNA
BEGINS NEXT WEEK



Lido Has His Day

By Robert J. Horton

MARIE, who was one of Mrs. Peyton Reyburton Banks's maids, was bathing Llano, Mrs. Peyton Reyburton's thoroughbred, aristocratic poodle.

It was morning and the trees in Central Park across the avenue, in their new spring dress of green, were bathing also—in the rays of a rising sun.

Five blocks away Officer O'Flannery, pacing slowly up his beat, twirling his club, shooting a glance now and then at the imposing entrance of the Banks palace in the distance, chided himself upon the fact that for a year he had been violently and uncompromisingly in love with Marie and had lacked the courage to tell her of this fact.

He sighed and scowled at a shabby pedestrian.

Down the side street nearest to the mansion of the Banks, upon the balcony of a regulation brownstone front dwelling, John Maxwell, stingy, proud, and mortgaged to his eyebrows, was taking the morning air and congratulating himself that the generosity of his creditors had enabled him to escape the ignominy of being thrown into the street or paying the interest on his mortgage—which would be almost as bad.

Farther east, on this same street, in an even less pretentious residence, Michael McCawley, corrupt but feared and powerful political boss of a ward that had always been corrupt and powerful, was preparing to descend to his car for the day's double-crossing and graft.

McCawley deserved to be dethroned but none dared take the initial step. Once taken, this step would start an avalanche, for the ward leaders had long since worn sore in the McCawley harness. But, for obvious reasons, this step remained untaken.

And, as far separated from all these as any one possibly could be, was Memphis Louie, who reposed upon a bench in the park with the want-ad section of a yesterday's paper spread across his knees, as he sat pondering over matters.

The years had stroked Memphis Louie with an unkind hand. His hair was white; his face rimmed and lined; his eyes watery; his gait unsteady. But within his heart of hearts there still burned a spark of something that had been there when he first romped in the bluegrass meadows of Tennessee.

The night before he had done an unprecedented thing. He had refused a drink! To-day his thoughts were in the southland and had to do with a longing for a cabin and a patch of ground as a fit hibernation for his sunset years.

Now the stage is set. Routine has its clue to enter. But coincidence lurks in the wings!

Mrs. Peyton Reyburton Banks took the soft, white, warm Llano, fresh from his bath and combing, from the maid's arms into her own.

She breathed into his silk fringed ears.

"Is oo—oo oggly oo-oo-ooosms-oo?" she lisped.

Llano promptly "ooed."

Mrs. Peyton, by the way, did not at this moment look anything like she had on the afternoon previous when she had addressed the Women's League to advocate the more stringent regulation of bathing suits. Certain facial refinements were lacking and there were flecks of white which looked suspiciously like curl papers in her hair which was not so—

But there are privacies to be respected.

She gave Llano a parting hug and handed him to the maid as she departed from the room.

The maid put Llano on a chair while she answered the telephone.

Llano flopped off the chair, scooted out the door, and tumbled down the stairs, much as a ball of white wool will tumble off a knitter's lap and roll away.

Eventually the poodle rolled out a French window, across a sun porch, down a flight of broad white steps, over a green lawn, and under a gate into the street.

Dogs will be dogs in spite of pedigreed handicaps!

Ten minutes later Mrs. Peyton emitted a shriek.

"You say you can't find Llano? You wicked thing! Summon the servants; have the house searched; tell Frederick to call the housekeeper."

The machinery of the great Banks household was fast set in motion. But no Llano. Mrs. Banks was desperate. She flung herself into a limousine, curl papers and all, and carried the search abroad.

"Look up and down the avenue by the park," she commanded the weeping Marie. "Go ten blocks in each direction; I'll drive up the cross streets—I suppose that's where dogs go!"

Poor Marie, still weeping, and wearing apron and cap, ran to carry out the imperious bidding of her mistress, which took her directly toward the spot where Officer O'Flannery was that minute cursing himself for a coward!

Mrs. Banks, driving past the Maxwell

residence, saw old John Maxwell on the balcony.

The car halted at her order.

"Have you seen my prize poodle, Llano?" she demanded.

"Ah—let's see—I—"

"My poodle—have you seen my poodle?" The curl papers on Mrs. Peyton's head bobbed in anger.

"Your poodle? Why, I saw a dog pass a short time ago but I didn't know it was a—your poodle."

"Was it white?"

"I believe it was."

"You unmitigated wretch! Drive on Frederick. *I will have Mr. Banks foreclose the Maxwell mortgage to-morrow!*"

It was just at this psychological moment that Michael McCawley, having been delayed by a minor defect to the engine of his car, was lolling back in the cushions planning. He always was planning.

Mrs. Peyton's limousine drew up beside him.

"My man, did you see anything of a very white poodle dog running about the street within the past few minutes?"

McCawley removed his fat cigar and stared. Possibly it was the curl papers; anyway, he did not recognize Mrs. Peyton Reyburton Banks.

"Why, I dunno, lady. There's been quite a few dawgs running around, but I—Herbert, have you seen any white dawgs?" This last to his chauffeur, who was addressing certain remarks in an undertone to the engine.

"White dogs?" snarled the irate driver.

"Why, no; I've seen two purple ones, a yellow one, and a pretty striped blue one, but can't remember seeing any white ones!"

McCawley grinned. The wit of his chauffeur had always made a hit with him.

"Sir, do you mean to insult me?" Mrs. Peyton was as much thunderstruck with the very audacity of the idea as she was indignant.

"Well, you see, lady," smirked McCawley, "it's hard to keep track of all the dawgs in the neighborhood."

"I think I recognize you," said Mrs. Banks, slowly and evenly in a voice so cut-

ting and sinister that it fairly dripped ice. "You are that—that McCawley person. I think possibly I have enough influence in this ward to protect myself against the most remote possibility of further insults from you. I am Mrs. Peyton Reyburton Banks!"

The chauffeur straightened with a gasp.

"I shall take the matter up with Mr. Banks this evening," continued the outraged matron, gloatingly confident. "I know, from chance remarks, that he has been dissatisfied with you for some time. By this time to-morrow he will have arranged to remove every vestige of your power and you will be left—flat."

Mrs. Banks was not above a word or two of slang in an exigency such as this.

She withered the politician's chauffeur with a single scathing, scorching glance.

"You may drive on, Frederick!"

The cigar fell from McCawley's lips. He croaked in an odd sort of way and reached out a hand futilely as he saw his power and political aspirations departing forever with Mrs. Banks's speeding car.

In a cave in a mountain of steel and stone, towering above a down-town cañon, P. R. Banks, before whom a regiment of financiers cowered, talked sweetly into the telephone while he glowered at a litter of papers on his desk.

"Yes, dear, I'll do my best." He put the receiver on the hook gently.

"I hope nothing smaller than a two-ton truck runs over it!" he ground out between his teeth as he proceeded to set the power and influence of the Banks millions as a dragnet for Llano.

The police engaged in the search; firemen became alert; street-cleaners gave every stray canine the once, twice, and three times over. It became a sort of game in all the city departments.

The papers took it up.

"Mrs. Banks's prize poodle lost," became popular with the head writers. The word was carried underground by hurrying thousands in the subway; overheard by other thousands in the elevated railways; up-town and down-town and cross-town by street-car passengers and taxi fares.

By noon all the city knew that Mrs.

Banks had lost her milky white, silky haired prize poodle and was prostrated and in the hands of two physicians, an osteopath, and a corps of nurses at the Banks's palace on the avenue.

One thousand dollars reward was offered for the return of the poodle.

The search took on new life.

Meanwhile Llano was right where a dog should be in order not to be seen—in the middle of the streets.

But he was camouflaged. His long silky hair no longer was white. It now was a healthy yellow and fast taking on the tinge of a young tan.

And he was having the time of his life. He played in alleys with ragged kids and not one of them called him Llano.

"Here, Fido!" And as he scampered after a bare-legged urchin he knew the joy of a common, respectable, time-honored name that literally was *all* dog.

He delved also into ash cans, and got tangled between the legs of a fruit vendor, and chased after a coal-wagon, and was shunted into the gutter by a flying taxi, and roamed at will with a pack of miscellaneous dogs.

What's that? Here in New York? Why, certainly! The dog catcher does not get them all, my friend. There always will be miscellaneous dogs.

And while Llano—masquerading under the title bestowed upon him by a score of ragged East Side kids—was experiencing for the first time all the real thrills of dogdom, several people who had never before thought very much about dogs were at that moment thinking very much about one particular white poodle.

Old John Maxwell was himself peering under bushes and behind hedges in the park; McCawley had every henchman in his ward serving in the menial capacity of dog chaser; police captains and sergeants were urging their men to redoubled efforts, and the air in P. R. Banks's down-town office was as blue as P. R.'s face was purple. For P. R. could swear on occasion.

Only Officer O'Flannery and the maid, Marie, were unperturbed. They sat on a bench in a shady spot far from the mad-

dening chase. And Officer O'Flannery felt a hundred times more satisfied with himself than when he had won the hero medal for taking the famous Rudwick gang single-handed.

His left arm was somewhere out of sight, but his right hand, in plain view, held both of Marie's!

That evening Memphis Louie, more shaky than usual, was wending his way along a cross street toward his bench in the park.

A dirty, scraggly, but friendly little dog came pattering toward him with its red tongue hanging far out the side of its mouth. It stopped before Louie.

"Hello, mut, where are *you* going?" asked Louie, as he stooped to pet the matted, muddy head.

The dog licked his hand and laid down at his feet.

"Why you're tired!" exclaimed Louie, quickly sympathetic. There was that in the dog's dejected attitude which likened its situation to his own. He picked it up, cuddled it in his left arm, and resumed his way to the park.

Michael McCawley, stepping from his car and wiping beads of sweat from his forehead, whistled in surprise.

"Where'd you get that dog?" he demanded harshly as Louie approached.

This was no cop, Louie knew.

"What's that to you?"

"I'll give you five dollars for him!"

Louie looked down at the tired, friendless canine tramp. Why, it was actually asleep, snuggled there in his arm. How warm its little body was. It was the first thing approaching a companion Louie had had in months.

"Not on your life; nor fifty won't buy him," said Louie stoutly.

"I see—after the reward, eh," sneered McCawley and bit his lip fiercely as he watched the shambling figure proceed on its way.

John Maxwell was returning from the day's futile search in the park. His feet were sore; his shoulders were bent; he sighed frequently and audibly. He almost bumped into Louie with his burden.

"Why! My man—is that him? Yes;

I see some white on his belly. Where'd you find him?"

"What's that to you?" retorted Louie. What was the matter with all these people, he asked himself. They would fool around bumping into him and asking questions until they woke his dog up.

"I'll give you a dollar if you'll tell the missis for me that I really didn't know it was her dog or I would have—"

"Get out of my way!" shouted Louie to the jabbering but earnest Maxwell.

The latter obeyed. Perhaps, after all, Mrs. Banks would relent now, he reasoned.

Louie, stepping carefully so as not to jar his slumbering companion, continued on his way muttering against a lax law which permitted crazy people to wander at large.

He turned the corner and started past the high iron rail and stone protected frontage of the Banks plot.

There was a startled exclamation.

"Holy Mackerel!" exclaimed a lookout. "So you found him, eh? An' are bringing him home. No wonder the most of them couldn't tell him with that cake of mud and dirt on. Gee! Won't the madam rave with joy!"

Louie felt a hearty slap on his back. Before he could even begin to formulate an impression he was dragged by the arm through the gate and up the marble steps into a great hall.

Already there was a commotion inside.

"Oh, my baby; oh, my baby!" Mrs. Peyton Reyburton Banks came running—yes, actually running—with a retinue of doctors, nurses, servants, and even P. R. B. himself, in her wake.

"And you brought him back, my man. *You* knew him. You're a great deal better and have got more sense than the rest of them even if you *are* a tra—a needy person. Give him the thousand dollars reward we advertised, Peyton; he's earned it!"

Memphis Louie felt the unaccustomed, soothing scratch of new bills in his hand. His eyes bulged and his mouth opened and shut silently.

He did not reason why. He held in his hand what precluded all argument. As he turned to go he saw a large woman cuddling to her bosom the mud-stained ball of ani-

mated wool he had held but a moment before.

Officer O'Flannery stopped and stared in amazement at the unusual sight of a bench lounge sitting on the curb and stuffing hundred-dollar bills into his shoe.

"Here! Where'd you get that?"

Louie, for once, was unabashed before the law. "Right back in that big house. Man and woman gave it to me for a dog."

A great light dawned on the cop.

"Oh, so you found him, eh?" he grinned.

"How much did they give you?"

"One thousand dollars," said Louie in a firm voice. Now that the money was his, he felt joyful.

"Shake!" exclaimed the cop. "We're both winners. Only I got more'n ten times that much!"

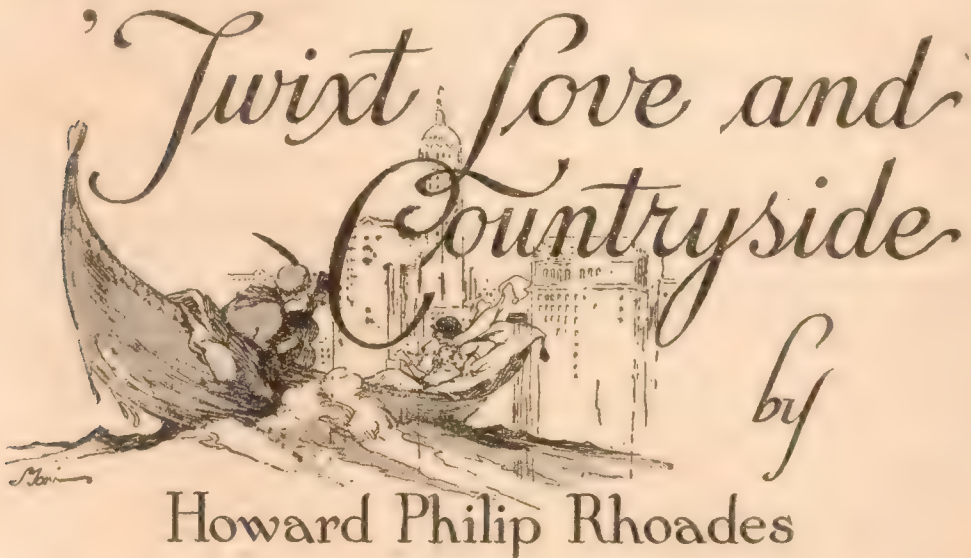
"Did you get ten thousand?" stammered Louie, awed.

"No—*one* in ten thousand," answered Officer O'Flannery, as he beamed on a shabby pedestrian, and thought of the flat-hunting expedition that he and Marit had planned for the morrow.

'Twixt Love and Countryside

by

Howard Philip Rhoades



BENTON TREVOR first met the mischievous sprite which rocked the boat of his newly married bliss when he took his bride out to see their future home in the hills of New Jersey. He had saved the trip for the crowning triumph of the honeymoon. Now he planned to show this beautiful girl who hitherto had tasted so few luxuries, the greatest gift of a wealthy husband.

This was the home which he had seen through all his years of struggle. This was the hearthstone about which lay broad acres, orchards of wonderful promise, gardens landscaped into lovely pictures, and barnyards filled with the merry symphonies which soothe the man whose heart is far from the city.

"Look dear," he said, halting the ma-

chine, which he had driven himself so that they might be alone on this first trip. "That's where you and I are going to live. That's Westcroft!" His hands slipped from the wheel and around her, while his ruddy cheek and graying temples nestled close to her vibrant young hair.

In his enthusiasm he overlooked that she said nothing. Then, listening for an expression, he thought she was spellbound. He turned her face, striking in its delicate lines, if lacking in color and robustness, and gazed into it fondly.

She was vaguely agitated. "Is that our home?" she asked slowly. "I thought—"

"What, dear?"

"I thought it was a summer home. But people would live there all the year around."

"People? You mean 'we.'"

"But—"

"There my little city hayseed! Of all the people the born and bred New Yorker is the most provincial. You had an idea my home, because it was in the country, was only a summer place—like one of those shanties with which they profane the name of bungalow down at Rockaway."

"No, I knew it was larger—"

"Like houses at Manhattan Beach, perhaps?"

"I didn't know—"

"Do you real New Yorkers ever admit it?" he smiled. "Now there are lots of things you don't know. For one I've brought you out here to learn that the United States is not bounded on the west by the North River, and on the east by the East River."

"I've never been in Missouri, and you'll have to show me," she joked back.

"I certainly shall," he said, starting the car. "We turn here and keep along the ridge to the next road. Then I'll show you the highest house in the country, a lawn that makes a golf links look like a cow pasture, the finest private dairy—"

"How far is the city, Benton?" she asked.

"Only fifteen miles in a straight line. Not far enough. I'd be glad to commute clear back to Ohio every night if the airplanes were doing a little better."

"This is far enough," she said eloquently. "One might as well—"

"Be in some far Western State—like Pennsylvania," he completed. "I'm thankful for the hills. If they weren't there you could actually see New York."

They were swinging past a tall green hedge beyond which lay a white Colonial house, the exquisite setting of that carefully achieved scheme of verdure and paths. Through a stately brick gateway they passed and up to the mansion which unfolded an impressive detail as they approached.

On the broad steps were four servants bowing and smiling at the master and the new mistress. Inside was the comfortable dimness of a big house in the afternoon when day is just beginning to wane. From room to room Trevor led her, and as she

passed through the succession of faultlessly furnished chambers her spirits rose visibly.

In the upper hall, after they had seen everything, he paused, an arm about her and whispered, "Do you like it, dear?"

"Beautiful!" she exclaimed.

"And the best of it," he said, drawing her gaily along, "come out and see!" As they went toward the rear he said: "You could build a house like this in New York—but see what you couldn't get there."

Stretching from the rear of the great white house was a lawn as smooth as a floor. Beyond a low hedge-bordered twin gardens one graceful with the estheticism of the old world, a marvel of fountains and statuary; the other informal and picturesque in its profusion of old-fashioned flowers.

"One a show place for our friends," he explained, "the other a bit of my old mother's garden for you and me."

As he led her between them he pointed onward. There lay a young orchard with its prim line of trees, and flanking it a vegetable garden with variegated shades of green in its rows. Further still, edged by a picturesque line of barns and stables, was a rolling meadow dotted with herds.

"There," he said, with a sweep of the hand. "That makes the home worth while."

She tried to smile as she joked: "You're not a commuter, Benton, you're a ranchman!"

"Hardly that, Sadie. But I am intensely fond of the country. I was born, as I think I've told you, on a little farm along the Muskingum in Ohio. It was beautiful there in the hills. Father became interested in the pottery business and we moved to town. I got into the business, and it was my fortune to turn out an executive. They sent me over as New York representative. Ten years later I put over the international combine which placed me where I can afford this. You see, dear, all the time I was working I was longing for somebody like you, and a place like this for her to enjoy."

His face was filled with such a fine exultation that the assertion in her heart could not out. She merely held to his arm and

snuggled close. He had hoped for some expression, for after a moment, he asked: "You like it all, don't you, Sadie?"

"Of course," she said. "After all it's not so far, and we can go in."

"You won't want to," he said with conviction. "There are charming people out here, and once you are settled the city will bore you to death."

Two hours later, day having blended into evening, they were seated in the big paneled dining-room through whose windows stole in the last purple tints. There was a cheerful blaze in the huge fireplace which Trevor had ordered, partly because the late spring evening was cool, and partly to lend a homelike air.

"Cora came North to cook for one of those little tea rooms off Fifth Avenue," he explained as they tasted their chicken gumbo, "but I couldn't let them keep her. With the priceless appetite one acquires out here, the best is none too good."

"Last night we were at Gerard's," she said reflectively, over that half of her soup which she was leaving.

"I was thinking of that," he said, "and wondering how many days old the celery was they served us. If any place in New York could get fresh things it would be Gerard's. But the only way is to grow one's own."

"Remember those people who sat across from us," she said, "the man in the French uniform, and the woman and little boy. At Gerard's there are always such interesting crowds."

"Crowds!" he exclaimed. "That's it." Then stretching wide his elbows, as if seeking room, he continued: "New York is all crowds. Even in Gerard's the people bump you, and the waiters stand around to fawn or snarl at you, according to the size of your tip. For years I've been wanting a place where there is plenty of room, and servants to put the food on the table, and then go away and let you enjoy it."

"Yes, there is plenty of room."

Something in her tone led him to explain quickly: "But we won't always have such an overwhelming amount of extra space—at least in here. Frequently we'll entertain. As I said, there's a wonderful set out here,

the sort of folks who recognize the country as the logical and wholesome place in which to live. I stayed out here and got acquainted with them before I built. They'll be calling soon, and at the earliest possible time we'll give a little dinner."

"The earliest possible time" proved to be two weeks later. They were weeks from which even the calls which Sadie's husband had predicted did not lift from her a distressing dullness. In fact, in the whole two weeks there were but two events which brought any joy into her life. Twice the new bride, who before her marriage never had been outside the metropolitan district and Long Island—save for the honeymoon at Atlantic City—went to New York.

Both times she was driven in to the office, met her husband, dined with him at his club, and went afterward to the theater. Rural comedies were the Broadway vogue that early summer, and as she left the selection of tickets to Trevor, he chose the best of them the first time. The second time she voiced a desire to see a Parisian farce of which she had heard, when he rebuked her in a kindly way and told her he thought another play—naming the second rural drama—would be better.

That night as they rode back over the Jersey mountains he sniffed the country air redolent of the first summer hay, and lay back sighing in content. The cool, strange darkness, and the croaking of the frogs as they crossed a stream, recalled to her the lonesome depression which she had once felt when passing a night in the country on Long Island.

Then Trevor's arm was about her, and he was telling her enthusiastically about the third rural play. Her voice was unsteady when she forced an answer—so unsteady that he asked: "What's the matter, Sadie?"

"Nothing, Benton," she said. "Maybe I'm a little lonesome out here."

"There, dear," he comforted. "You won't be after to-morrow night when we have the dinner. So far you haven't had a chance to really get acquainted."

To the dinner came six guests. There were John Davidson, the horseman, and his wife; Mrs. Patricia York, and her son Desmond York, and Mr. and Mrs. Allan Ford,

The former was a member of a Wall Street firm.

As they entered the dining-room a satisfied relief came to Benton Trevor. The lights and laughter, the elements for which he felt sure his wife hungered, were there. Here was the crowd and bustle which had been lacking and he was happy as he smiled at her to find that she was smiling back.

He was pleased. So much that he chuckled in self-assurance to Mr. Ford, who sat close by: "You know, Ford, I'm expecting you folks to make Mrs. Trevor like the country. So far I'm afraid she's not impressed."

"Well, I don't blame her," cut in Mrs. Ford, before her husband could reply, "being out here such a short time. I'm still awfully lonely some days."

"She's lonesome for Cleveland," said her husband slyly. "She likes those small towns with public squares. Don't let her pretend she misses New York."

"Well, I don't care," pouted Mrs. Ford, who was a pretty woman with a passion for fashionable dress, "I lived for two years in New York."

"Did you live there long, Mrs. Trevor?" asked the elderly Mrs. Davidson.

"All my life," said Sadie.

"You must miss it, then," said Mrs. Davidson. "But never mind. You'll soon get the swing of life here and love it. I've a splendid pair of Airedales and have been begging Mr. Trevor to come and pick one of them, ever since he sent me those wonderful evergreens. Come over and get the dog yourself."

"And I'm not to be left out," insisted Desmond York, a likable young man whose only other care beside his mother was his interest in golf. "The moment I heard Mr. Trevor was to be married I asked him, 'Does she play golf?' and when he said you didn't I got permission to teach you. Between mother's roses and my golf we couldn't live in the city at all, and we want to make you right at home."

Other urgent pleas to be allowed to help in making Mrs. Trevor acquainted with the country were not lagging. Yet after dinner when Mr. Trevor and Mr. Ford were discussing candidates for election at the

Country Club, and Mrs. Davidson and Mrs. York the best summer mulch for the La France rose, and Desmond York was protesting to Mr. Davidson that after all the Long Island golf links were not real ones, the new Mrs. Trevor found herself talking to the pretty and fashionably dressed Mrs. Ford who had confessed a lonesomeness in the country.

Trevor, who had engineered this dinner largely with the desire of gently leading his wife into bucolic paths, did not fail to make mental note of this. He had it well in mind when, after the party, he put his arm around his wife and asked her how she had enjoyed herself.

"Wonderfully," she said.

"I did too," he smiled. "There can't be greater pleasure than getting together people for whom you care the most. Once I thought some day I'd go back to Ohio, and live with the folks who were dear to me in my youth. But it's impossible. So before marriage I cultivated people who are my sort—lovers of the country who refuse to let the great city engulf them. Didn't you think Mr. and Mrs. Davidson a fine couple, and York and his mother? Mr. Ford—"

"I liked Mrs. Ford," she said.

"A bright woman, but I am afraid the love of the country which she professes is not sincere."

"We weren't talking about the country," his wife said. "She was asking me about New York. And I felt so strange in trying to answer—like I was talking about something I'd been away from a lifetime."

Trevor decided this remark was a pretty sincere expression of the reactions of the country upon his wife, so far, as he thought the matter over that night. Weighing the problem he recalled the story told of the wife of a business associate. Having moved from a small Nebraska town to New York she later told a friend: "The first year we were over here I thought I would die of lonesomeness. Then I went home on a visit. Beside Broadway the place was a morgue. I've never gone back save as a matter of duty."

The more Benton Trevor thought this story over the more he decided that it is

a poor rule which doesn't work both ways. He only pondered long enough to make sure that his young bride was not brightening up any in the country, and that the only one of her new friends in whom she seemed interested was Mrs. Ford, worshiper at the shrine of Manhattan.

Then he decided to rub the veneer off Broadway by a strong application of a long-ing for Broadway.

"How would you like to go in for a week, dear?" he asked. "There are lots of plays and restaurant shows we would enjoy. And the ruralizing process can wait."

Being in New York for any purpose was food for the hunger which had been gnawing at Mrs. Trevor. On Monday morning she rode in with her husband and had the car for an afternoon's shopping. Then at the dinner hour she met him in quarters they had taken in a hotel near Grand Central Station.

"Monday night's not much in the Broadway places," said Trevor. "We can dine at the hotel, and then go to the theater." He took care that the play was none of the three rural dramas, but a sophisticated farce.

When he suggested a certain place after the theater she displayed a reluctance which might have escaped another. But Benton Trevor had brought his wife to New York to enjoy herself in her own way, and he asked if she would like some other place better.

"There's Dickson's on Forty-Second Street," she said. "When Daisy Norris and I were gallery gods we used to go there after the theater for a thirty-five-cent spree. I'd like to taste their waffles and syrup again."

He smiled at her over a plain table where they were surrounded by a chattering crowd of young clerks showing their sweethearts an humbler night life at the edge of Broadway.

"You turn down lobster and music for this?" he bantered.

"I wasn't thinking of the contrast," she said. "I felt homesick for the place."

But she remembered his smile at her whim and, eager to please her husband, made sure thereafter that they went to

the places he suggested. One night it was the gilded rendezvous where "America's Foremost Shimmyist" held forth; another the roof where a smart and undressed revue gets under way at midnight.

Now it was the little restaurant copied after a famous Paris café; then a drama of the hour picturing four people very tired of their marriage ties. At last on Friday a wind-up tour of cabarets and show places followed by Saturday morning when they slept late and Trevor said he would not go to business.

Over breakfast he said: "This is our last day, dear. Where away?"

"You've given me so much time this week, Benton," she answered. "I don't want to get rid of you, but why don't you have the day for yourself?"

"But what will you do?"

"I'll be seeing New York."

"How?"

"In my own way."

"Will you tell me about it when you come back?"

"Surely—if you'd like to hear."

At seven they met again to prepare for dinner.

"Would you mind if we had it served here in the room?" she asked.

"No," he said in surprise. "But why?"

"Just a whim," she said with a smile. "This evening on an elevated platform uptown I looked into a window and saw a family having dinner in their little living-room."

"And you want to imitate them?" he asked.

She looked at him seriously and confessed: "It made me think of the time when mother was still alive, before Tom went into the navy and Harry was married. Sometimes I think if I could be just a little more crowded at a meal—have to set the bread plate on the piano, or something, I'd enjoy the food more."

"You queer child," he said, stroking her hair. "Where did you go to-day?"

"You order and I'll tell you."

When he had returned and taken her hand she said: "First I rode down to Fourteenth Street. On Twelfth Street not far from Sixth Avenue is an old line of red

bricks. I was born in one of them. It's still there—a rooming-house now. I stole through a court to get a look at the back yard."

As he smiled indulgently she admitted: "It was dirty and partly blocked with store boxes. But that's where Tom and Harry and my little sister May—the one who died—used to play under a big tree."

"I suppose it didn't look—"

"Not like it did—no. Nobody's old home does, I suppose. It looked pretty shabby and neglected and sorrowful. But it made me remember. Through the gray I seemed to see the sun as it shone when we were all children together. Under the tree, now a shriveled old ruin, I saw where May had her little doll house, and where we played being grown-up and married."

He pressed her hand, for the heart's regret showed in her eyes.

"Then," she smiled through a mist, "I went over past the old school. There by the gate I remembered graduation day when Paddy Irwin gave me the rose. Paddy has had a time of it. He grew up a bartender, and now they've closed the saloons."

As Trevor laughed she went on: "I went looking for one or two old friends. But they were gone. It wasn't a disappointment. One expects it in New York. Then I went for a walk."

"Where?"

"Northward from 110th Street—where people live. Through some poor streets and some finer ones upon the hill. It didn't matter. All around me were people. Of course I didn't know them. But they were *there*. Just to hear the bus come pounding along, and the little bell jingle faintly; to watch the kids drawing courts for hopscotch; to see the Italians trundling their ice carts, and to look in the window of a delicatessen when you're getting hungry; then as night comes on to catch the savor of some cooking dish come out an apartment-house door—"

"But, Sadie, you could see that sort of thing every day."

"If I lived in New York! Dear, don't you see?" she said eagerly. "New York things of every-day life are to me like your fields, your flowers, your dairy. I was

brought up with them. They are my sort of life. All these things you have been taking me to—"

"Go on," he urged.

"All the shows and cabarets—what they call the 'Great White Way'—that's tourist stuff, the sort of things folks come in from smaller towns to see. Of course native New Yorkers like the theater, and night life. But not more than other people. 'Home, sweet home,' is as sweet here as anywhere."

She looked at him, eyes filled with a wistful meaning. Vaguely he sensed a sadness as deep as the chasm which seemed to yawn between them. He drew her close to him.

"Sadie," he said softly. "Do you remember when I proposed to you. It was the first time I'd had time to think in years, it seemed. Years of rush and work. Then things broke right for me, and I realized how hollow and incomplete my life had been."

"Yes," she said, close to his shoulder.

"I realized that I needed a wife. But I was dazed. There were so many—yet none for me. The gaudy butterflies and the home-keeping girls seemed equally useless. With the mind of a business man I demanded a keen sensible girl that I was sure I would never find. Then the dawn, which must have been with me subconsciously for months, appeared. My secretary, Sadie Wilke, was the girl."

She nodded, leaning her head against him.

"I've been so glad to hear that you like a home. On that it's easy for us to agree. And on the other, dear, there's a way—"

"Of course there's a way!" She had pushed back a trifle and taken him by the shoulders. With great earnestness she went on: "It's very simple. I'll stop being silly and go back with you to that beautiful home in Jersey. I must, I will be happy there—forgive me, Benton. Please, forgive me."

"Sadie—you mean it?" he gasped with agitation, drawing her close into his arms. For a long time they stood thus. Then there was a knock and dinner came in. They went nowhere that night, and in the morning went back home.

Throughout all that day, which was Sun-

day, she was about the estate with him, asking questions, and making plans for the future. "I've been so foolish," she said, when she started for her room that night. "But now I know that we're going to be happy here."

He kissed her, and she went up-stairs, leaving him to read a little longer in the library. Appreciating her great battle, and how she had sacrificed for him, he had the impulse to follow and thank her.

Passing unheard over the soft carpet he stood outside their room. The door was ajar. Sadie stood with her back to him beside the tall east window. Even through the light of the room came to him the attraction which held her there. Far in the east was the white glow always seen at Westcroft at night—the lights of New York.

He withdrew silently. Below, he sat down in his chair heavily—wearily—a sad contrast to the vigor with which he had leaped to follow her. And as he settled back in it he returned to a heavy, weary problem.

But morning brushed aside discouragement and extended a chance to battle anew. Sadie was in his arms, as fair as a rose, when he said good-by. "Be a good girl," he smiled, "and to-night we'll have an early dinner and start on those books I want to read you."

Through the rush of affairs that day came to him new confidence. He could—he must—win her over by careful leadership. He would go home early so she would be lonesome for a shorter time, and he would make the evening a delight.

So when he went out at noon he pushed through crowded lower Broadway to the finest candy shop where he purchased a huge round box of chocolates, and to the shop of a florist where he placed an order for roses to be delivered at two. Then quickly he pushed out of the way the most pressing of his work, and ordered his car.

As he was about to step into it ten minutes later he felt some one grasp his arm. Turning, he found a debonair, smart-looking young man who addressed him by name.

"Roberts—from the Gale & Carter office," reminded the young man. "Remember me on the West Broadway deal?"

"Of course, Mr. Roberts. What can I do for you?"

"You're leaving. I'll see you another day."

"I'm starting home. But no matter. Get in and ride down toward the ferry."

"If I wouldn't be intruding—"

"Not at all. What's on your mind?"

"It's this way, Mr. Trevor. We've a client who is very much interested in your place in Jersey. We understand you want to sell—"

"Who told you that?"

"It came to us in a roundabout way, and I've ventured to take our interested client out past your estate. She's an elderly widow with money, and desiring very much to get into the country. I don't mind saying she fell in love with the place as she saw it from the road, and if—"

"I'm sorry, Roberts," said Trevor, as they pushed through the sea of traffic in West Street, toward the ferry house. "My place isn't on the market at all. I don't know who could have told you it was—unless it is one woman out our way who never has been contented in the country, and takes delight in finding company."

"I don't think the tip came from any of your neighbors," said Roberts, trying to cover Mrs. Ford, from whom it had come, as a matter of fact.

"I'm sure it didn't come from me," said Trevor. "When a man neglects his work to hurry cr so he and his wife can enjoy their place in the country together it doesn't look much like discontent."

"No," admitted Roberts. "Well, I'm sorry," he went on, moving as if to get out. "We must have been misinformed."

"That's all right," said Trevor. "But now that you're here there's something come to my mind. Ride along if you've nothing important. I want to tell you about a piece of ground next to the Hoboken plant that we would like to get. It's something you can talk over with Mr. Gale, and then see what you can do."

So Roberts crossed the river with Trevor, and they discussed the business project crossing the Jersey lowlands, and rising into the hills. When a campaign of action had been agreed upon, Roberts, still with a

hunch that there might be something in the original proposition, reverted.

"If you find that you want to come in even for the winter, Mr. Trevor," he said, "we're closing up the leases on our new Park Avenue house. There's a mighty pretty southern exposure on the tenth floor—eight rooms and three baths—"

Trevor laughed. "You real-estate sharks are more persistent than reporters," he said. "Look there. What's a Park Avenue apartment to that!"

On the hilltop opposite lay Westcroft, with its great white house set amid picturesque greenery. "Tell Gale what I said about the Hoboken property," said Trevor. "If there's ever anything doing on the other I'll give you first chance. Ride over to the house with me, and then I'll have William take you to the railroad."

They passed through the stately gateway and pulled before the broad porch. As Trevor stepped out and paused to bid the real-estate man good-by his butler appeared.

"If you please, sir," he said. "Mrs. Trevor went over to Blendon Meadows with Mrs. Ford. I thought—that—"

"Yes," Trevor prompted, as the man hesitated nervously.

"There's one of those army aviators there, sir, taking folks rides. Mrs. Ford called her up, and they went over. Mrs. Trevor didn't expect you back so soon and—"

"I'll go over, Roberts," Trevor said. "It's on the way to the station. Hurry along, William. I—"

He did not finish. But as they approached the open space which the butler had named he pushed to the window of the car, scanning the sky. Trevor was a cautious business man nearing middle age. He had nerves. Sadie—

The big car was just rounding the timberland which was beside Blendon Meadows when there was a whirl aloft. Cutting the air just above, its propeller drawing it upward in a spiral, flew a white airplane.

As they reached the edge of the landing field Trevor sprang from the car. "Wait, Roberts," he said. "I'll bring Mrs. Trevor, and we'll drive you over." But as he ap-

proached the little group in the field his face paled slightly, and his lips set hard. Sadie was not there. There was only one person he knew. It was Mrs. Ford.

His anxious face asked his question.

"She's up there," pointed Mrs. Ford, and laughed. "I just took a ride. It's wonderful!"

Trevor intensely watched the speck above.

"It's going higher than he took me," babbled Mrs. Ford. "Because—"

A sharp movement in the little group interrupted her. A greasy mechanic was shading his eyes as the tiny craft far in the sunny sky moved erratically. It had turned and from the east was dropping back west swiftly—and silently. This silence smote ominously on the man who knew the whims of the pilot and even better the peculiarities of the machine.

Once or twice there seemed a sort of recovery. But it was brief and never once came that assuring song of the engine. Then the crowd about Trevor blurred into a shrieking, terrified chaos. He found himself flying over the field cursing and praying in a breath—hope and anguish nearly killing him.

Now just beyond was the prone and shattered wreck. How clearly then his heart called out! Two younger, cooler men had preceded him. One was holding in his arms a white form. Something in Trevor's face led him silently to make way.

As the husband's arms closed about the girlish form Sadie opened her eyes. Slowly, a little painfully, she stirred, and then breathed faintly: "I'm all right, dear. See, I can move—forgive me. I only went because he promised we would see New York."

Trevor placed his coat beneath her head. Slowly he made his way back toward the car, and shouted for William to drive in. Then, weak in the reaction, he waited as Roberts ran to his side.

"Need a doctor, Mr. Trevor?" asked Roberts, half afraid to speak.

"No, Roberts," said Trevor. "I need a real-estate agent. Westcroft is on the market, and hold that Park Avenue place until we see it."

Heart to Heart Talks



By the Editor



EVEN the astute and presumably omniscient editor sometimes fails to grasp fully the possibilities of a story. He cannot always tell whether its publication is to be a magazine incident or a literary event. It was so, we admit, when back in October, 1912, we published a novelette by the then almost unknown Edgar Rice Burroughs. The story was called "Tarzan of the Apes," and while we knew, of course, that it had all the potential elements of success and popularity, we were, to tell the truth, far from realizing to just what extent this popularity would attain. But, to speak colloquially, believe us, *we sure started something*. The fame of the ape man, introduced so modestly not quite eight years ago, has gone around the world, and to-day the name of Tarzan—and that of his creator—is known wherever books are read or motion-pictures flourish—and that includes most of the habitable globe.

Following this first story we published a number of others, notably, "The Beasts of Tarzan" (*Cavalier*, May 16 to June 13, 1914), "The Son of Tarzan" (*ALL-STORY WEEKLY*, December 4, 1915, to January 8, 1916), and "Tarzan and the Jewels of Opar" (November 18 to December 16, 1916); several other Tarzan stories have been published in book form and a few in other magazines, for the great ape man's adventures have been so many and various that it was beyond the capacity of one magazine to chronicle them all and leave space for anything else, but now once more he returns to the pages wherein he first saw the light. In next week's magazine will appear the first of the five instalments of

TARZAN AND THE VALLEY OF LUNA

BY EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

Author of "Under the Moons of Mars," "At the Earth's Core,"
"The Cave Girl," "The Mucker," etc.

It would be unkind to say anything here that might in any way anticipate the story and mar your enjoyment, so we will only say that in it Mr. Burroughs has lived up to his principle of making each story he writes just a little better than the one before.



WHEN some years ago we were all singing "I'm Afraid to Go Home in the Dark," few people, it is safe to assume, saw anything more in the words than a catchy, sentimental ditty. But as a matter of fact, the refrain embodied a sound psychological truth. We are all afraid of the dark, afraid of the unknown, terrorized by an abnormal portent.

From the days of Halley's comet to the recent prediction of the end of the world, men have been filled with the fear by the approach of the unusual, the advent of the unexplainable. We moderns are

seemingly a hard-headed and an incredulous lot. But the bravest of us are none too sure of our courage when we are brought face to face with the portents of the gods.

In next week's novelette

THE MASTER OF BLACK

BY PHILIP M. FISHER, Jr.

Author of "The Ship of Silent Men," "The Volcanologist," etc., the author has seated Science on the footstool of the gods and arranged a portent so tremendous and

terrifying that a benevolent idealist was able to hold the whole financial world in the hollow of his hand. This may not sound particularly awe-inspiring but we are convinced few people can read this "different" story without experiencing an uncanny quiver of the spine. The author is noted for his grasp of the weird and this story will add to his unusual laurels.

Did you like "BENEATH THE MAKE-UP," the first of the "NAN RUSSELL, INVESTIGATRIX" series? We know the answer—you did, and you want to hear more about her. You shall. "IN THE LIGHT," the second of Raymond Lester's fine series of high-voltage detective tales will appear in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY. Nan is scheduled for many pulse-quickenings adventures in the coming stories of this series, but none, we'll wager, more exciting than those that befall her in this one. Of course you'll be sure not to miss these thrills!

Does the flag follow the men or do the men follow the flag? "Depends on circumstances, of course," you reply. Rightly, we take it, in action men follow their colors and dare and die under the ægis of their country's flag. In the "peaceful penetration" of a foreign country, the flag follows the man. In Herman Howard Matteson's excellent story "REMEMBERING ST. PATRICK" in next week's magazine, you will find an instance of how a bold Irishman flung his green emblem in the face of his Oriental antagonists. We leave it to you to decide if this expedition should be recounted peaceful penetration or private warfare. Your decision, we warn you in advance, will in no wise minimize your pleasure in the story.

We wish every one who believes honesty is a matter of circumstances and virtue a matter of propinquity could read "FOOTSTEPS OF THE LAW" by Dixie Willson in next week's magazine. This crisp little study in psychology and the secret springs of decision is a good antidote for the man who holds human nature cheap. This is not only a remarkable story but a story beautifully told by a writer whose art grows more certain with each new tale. If you are looking for a story of unusual distinction don't overlook this little masterpiece.

Every ambitious young man is constantly on the lookout for ways and means by which he can impress his chief with the fact that he is wasted in his present place and ought to be advanced to a new position of responsibility and initiative. Untutored youth is ever restive under official indifference. We could not with a good conscience commend the method of William Hugo Pabke's hero in his story "TAKING CHANCES" as the safe road to advancement but we can recommend this story

as an exciting little tale with a startling surprise in the end. Don't miss it in next week's magazine if you want "to get next" to a good thing.

WORTH A DOLLAR A COPY

TO THE EDITOR:

Please find enclosed money order for two dollars for which send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for six months commencing January 1st. I would send more but am not sure where I will be after that but will sure have the ALL-STORY WEEKLY if it costs a dollar a copy. I have been a reader ever since "The Brain Blight" was published and I also bought the *Cavalier* from the time of "The Strength of Sampson" was published and with the exception of the time I was in the army I have read every number of the good old magazine, so you see I am an old friend even if I have been a silent one up to now.

I would like to ask the kickers what is their idea of a story if they don't like the "different" ones. They are the reason I read. They are about all I read. I don't like Western stories or the common run of stories of adventure but when I get a "different" then nothing can pry me away until I finish it. "The Girl in the Golden Atom" and "The Moon-Pool" were fine. "The Brain Blight," "Under the Andes," "The Man Without a Soul," "The Outsider," the "Tarzan" stories, the "Mars" stories and a lot of other stories that were published about 1913 and 1914 were the best I ever read.

Among the later good ones are "Misery Mansions" which was a masterpiece and "Palos of the Dog Star Pack" was very good. "Drift of Eternity" was a peach and I am enjoying "The Flying Legion" very much. All of E. K. Means's negro stories are good. "The Grouch," "The Whimpy," and all the "different" stories are fine, and as long as you continue to publish them you will be sure of me as a steady customer, for one of them makes up a lot of other stuff I don't care for, and I am not a hog.

I am glad to be able to get one good one a week. Well, I guess I have said enough, so here's the best of wishes for a prosperous New Year to yourselves and the ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

Brewer, Maine.

RALPH H. CARTER.

DROPS EVERYTHING TO READ "THE GOLD GIRL"

TO THE EDITOR:

I have been reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY since November, 1919—not very long, but in that short time have found it to be the "Magazine of Magazines" and that is saying some, because I have read oodles of magazines. No need saying I can hardly wait from one week to another for it, and my husband is just as anxious for it as I.

I have just finished reading "The Red Seal," by N. S. Lincoln and sure thought it fine. Am now

reading "The Big Story" by George Dilnot, "Raspberry Jam" by Carolyn Wells, "The Eye of Balomak" by Victor Rousseau, which are all good, and last but not least, "The Gold Girl" by James B. Hendryx. Right here I will say that Mr. Hendryx is a fine writer. In my writing I mention "The Gold Girl" last, but when I get a new issue of ALL-STORY WEEKLY, no matter what I am doing, whether the supervising of our daily meals or playing with baby, I drop everything and read "The Gold Girl" first. It just seems to be my kind of a good Western story. I have lived out West nearly all my life, also on ranches, and have been in the saddle more than out of it, so naturally all good Western stories appeal to me, and although "The Gold Girl" has not been concluded yet, I must say it is fine. It is so real, so near to life, and nothing at all impossible about it. In the December 20th issue of ALL-STORY WEEKLY you published a lovely novelette called "The Riders of Ramapo Pass" by Dean Heffernan. It was a very dear story to me, because it brought back memories of a time, when once I participated in just such an act as the heroine of that story did. I can never forget that story, and I remember I read that story over three times before I finally laid it aside. The novelette by E. K. Means, "The Left Hind Foot" in January 17, 1920, issue was a mighty good story and funny as well. I never have read anything so funny in my life, and when I read of *Org* and *Little Bit* eating the "candy mints"—it was too funny for words. I'll say, give us more "Tickfall" stories. They sure are fine.

I could name several other good stories that have appeared in ALL-STORY WEEKLY, such as "No Fear," "A Buccaneer in Spats" and "The Flying Legion" but my letter would be too long. Always best wishes for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY—the Magazine of Magazines.

Sheridan, Wyoming.

MRS. F. E. H.

MAX BRAND THE FAVORITE

TO THE EDITOR:

This is my third letter to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY in the course of the five years I have been reading it. I don't want to take much of your time, but still I must say a few words in praise of your splendid magazine, with your staff of first-class authors that are entertaining us every week. The authors whose stories I like best are: first, Max Brand, his stories, "The Untamed" which needs a sequel, the "Children of Night" and "Trailin'," and his novelettes of the olden days with sword duels. Second, Philip Gibbs, whose story "Misery Mansions" is a masterpiece that has no comparison. I hope we will have more of his work. Then there is Hulbert Footner who writes the best Canadian northwestern stories. Also his stories of New York life are classed by themselves, especially "The Substitute Millionaire" and the "Fugitive Sleuth."

In the way of comedies I like E. J. Rath's

stories best, then Edgar Franklin's. Other authors whose work I like are Sheehan, England, Raine, Stilson, Packard, Abdullah, and Ostrander. The different stories which are worthy of praise are "The Moon Pool" and its sequel. I hope we will have a sequel for them. Also "The Rebel Soul" and its sequel, "Into the Infinite" were good. I would be willing to pay twice the price I am paying now for a copy (which is twenty cents) to read stories by my favorite authors. I am enclosing you a money order to pay for one year's subscription to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. I am tired of going to the book stores and seeing that the magazine is not in yet or sold out. I want to get it regularly and sooner if possible. I will close with best wishes and prosperity to the "Belle" of the magazines, its publishers and authors.

GIBRAEL BABILLA.

Fort William, Ontario, Canada.

LIKES THE "TELEPHONE DETECTIVE" STORIES

TO THE EDITOR:

I have been a reader of your magazine for ever so long, and have spent many pleasant hours with the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. The Western stories appeal to me and I hope to be able to see "Trailin'" on the screen, the same as "Eastward Ho!" which made a wonderful picture. Have just finished reading "Raspberry Jam" and "The Gold Girl" both of which are first rate. Won't you please give us a sequel to the "Conquest of the Moon Pool"? Many other readers seemed to have liked that story and with my best wishes and the wishes of other readers we ought to wish ourselves into another story.

Max Brand is one of my favorite authors. As yet I have never seen anyone praise George Brenn's stories. I may be mistaken, but he is the author of those interesting stories regarding "Charles Fenwick," that wonderful telephone wizard. I run a small switchboard, so everything pertaining to the telephone interests me.

E. K. Means certainly hits the spot with his interesting negro stories. All my folks read the magazine, in fact there is a quarrel every week, but usually I get it at lunch time, and then no one is home. Another thing, please prevent further strikes. I never was so lonesome in all my life, as when the strike was on. Wishing your magazine success and a long life.

Bronx, New York.

MISS CECILE KRAYER.

LITTLE HEART-BEATS

Enclosed you will find money-order for six months' subscription for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. As I have settled down once more to the usual life after some eighteen months as a soldier here and in France, I find I must have my favorite magazine, the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. It is the best magazine for all sorts of stories that I have ever

been lucky enough to come across. I am an old admirer of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, having read it steadily for nearly ten years, up till 1918. The stories are all good, and I have no kick on any of the authors. By reading these I can get the same thrills that I got first-handed when fighting the Huns, and at a very much lower price than we paid as soldiers. Wishing the best that the world can give to these magazines and its editor, Chickasha, Oklahoma. O. B. BERGER.

I enclose twenty cents for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for January 17. I like your magazine. Just fine. I like almost all your stories; all but the negro stories by E. K. Means. I do not like them. My favorite authors: Max Brand, Randall Parrish, Isabel Ostrander, Captain Dingle, G. A. England, J. B. Hendryx, Natalie Sumner Lincoln, Achmed Abdullah, C. B. Stilson, Edgar Franklin, Hulbert Footner, J. McCulley, and oh, a number more. Hoping you will send my magazine at once, MRS. ALEX. WALKER.

Catlettsburg, Kentucky.

I have been looking forward with interest to another story by S. A. Rutherford, whose story, "The Bottled Town-Site," appeared last year (August 30, 1919) in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. It impressed me as being exceedingly clever and well written. I should like very much to see more of this author's work in your publications.

Milford, California. MISS FERN JOHNSON.

I am writing to express my admiration for your magazine. I have read enough to know a good story when I see one. My idea of a good story is A. Merritt's "Conquest of the Moon Pool." It is the best ever written. I have read a few letters in Heart to Heart Talks which knock this story. I think that the explanation of these letters is that the authors of them have not imagination enough to comprehend such a wonderful story which, true or untrue, is still wonderful. My favorite authors are E. R. Burroughs, A. Merritt, H. Eon Flint, and E. K. Means, all of whom are splendid writers. By the way, I think it only fair to relieve our readers of our suspense. We want, and must have, a sequel to that splendid story, "The Conquest of the Moon Pool." We also want one to the "Girl in the Golden Atom."

Atlanta, Georgia. THOS. W. HASLAM.

Enclosed find money-order for one dollar. Please send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for three months, starting with the issue of Saturday, December 13, 1919. I have been a reader of this magazine for nearly three years, and have not missed a single number until now. Have been unable to get any since the issue of December 6, and I sure hate to miss it. I have read several magazines, but the ALL-STORY WEEKLY has them all beat by a mile, and then some. I like Western and detective stories best, but all are good. The short stories and poems are, as a rule, excellent.

Would sure like a sequel to "The Untamed." "Tralin'" was a dandy, as were lots of others.

There is only one fault I have to find, and that is the "different" stories. Most of them are too absurd. But, believe me, I am not going to knock; instead, I am going to boost the best magazine published, ALL-STORY WEEKLY. Hoping to receive back numbers by return mail, I am as ever,

GEO. N. ALDRICH.

Pomfret Center, R. F. D. 2, Connecticut.

I want to tell you how I enjoy the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. I have been a reader of the ALL-STORY for the past ten or twelve years, and I don't think I have ever read any magazine during the time that has given me as much satisfaction as ALL-STORY has. I don't have any favorite authors, as they are all good. I read everything in each magazine. I see lots of kicks in most talks with the editor. I don't see why so many people should kick, because you always give the best; but it is impossible to satisfy each and every one. I am a telephone operator, and I find that it is impossible to satisfy each and every one of my subscribers.

I have just finished reading a story that was first published in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY by Edgar Rice Burroughs, and then was printed in book form, "Tarzan and the Jewels of Opar," and it was simply grand. The ALL-STORY WEEKLY will continue to lead them all in the future, as it has in the past. I am a sincere reader and a booster for ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

RUFUS L. ROLLINS.

P. O. Box 7, Farmville, North Carolina.

Find enclosed one dollar and send the only magazine impossible to do without to below address. Just as sure as I miss my weekly habit (ALL-STORY WEEKLY) I am sure to miss the starting of a story by Brand, Hendryx, or some other one of your famous authors. When is Charles Beecham going to transport his friends to African atmosphere. I could talk all night about my friends for I feel acquainted with the ALL-STORY WEEKLY authors. I believe I could read their characters almost as good as an India soothsayer. In vain I have looked for a name among the Heart to Heart Talks. They are very likely too busy. Thanking you for your stolen time.

Caledonia, New York.

S. P.

Having just finished reading "The Flying Legion" by G. A. England, I wish to say that I would like a sequel to it as I do not think it is finished. I have read the *Cavalier* and ALL-STORY magazines for eight years. This is my first letter and I would like to say that I think you had better increase the price of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY and give us 200 pages. I would be willing to pay more for it. Fifteen cents a copy would be about right. Thanking you very kindly for reading this letter.

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14	9.00	2.50
14 1/2	9.25	2.60
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Beautiful pants to your order, of fine quality striped worsteds, through and through weaves for dress or business, guaranteed to give you two solid years satisfying wear or MONEY BACK, tailored any style or size—No Extra Charges—parcel post or express prepaid. Biggest \$8.00 value ever offered or money back. Write for 60 cloth samples. **Free Special THIRTY DAY TRIAL OFFER**, one pair to a customer, **\$3.48**

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30 Days Free Trial allowed on the bicycle you select, actual riding test in your own town. Do not buy until you get our great new trial offer. **EASY PAYMENTS** if desired, at a small advance over our special **Factory-to-Rider** cash prices.

TIRES LAMPS, HORNS, pedals, single wheels and repair parts for all makes of bicycles at half usual prices. No one else can offer you such values and such terms. **SEND NO MONEY** but write today for the big new Catalog. **It's free.**

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FEW of us realize the importance of Fiction to the readers of national periodicals.

Take the Fiction out of such magazines as Harper's, Century, Scribner's and magazines of that type—

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Take the Fiction out of the Ladies' Home Journal, The Woman's Home Companion and others in that field—

Take the Fiction out of the small town field, the mail order field—

Take the Fiction out of The Argosy, All-Story Weekly, Adventure, Popular and others of their kind—

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You would lose 75% of the "bulk" of all magazines.

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If you can sell merchandise in the atmosphere that is created by the Fiction in other magazines, is there any reason why you cannot sell merchandise through the advertising pages in the atmosphere that is created by the Fiction in the ARGOSY COMBINATION? Particularly so when you bear in mind that the Fiction in all magazines is written by practically the same authors.

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**WAY LESS THAN
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*The only thirty-five
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sells for a quarter!*

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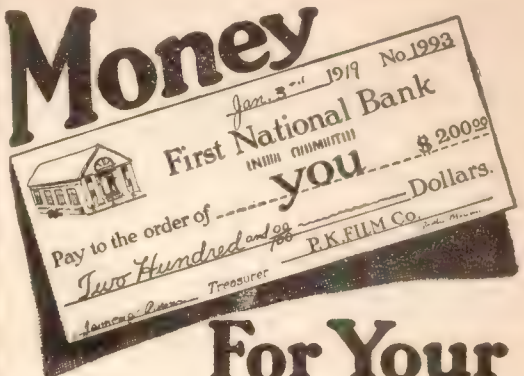
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Member A. B. C.

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The Frank A. Munsey Company

Money



For Your Photoplay Plots

Scores of men and women today are making big money in their spare time by helping supply the enormous demand for photoplays. Scores of producing companies are ready to pay for good ideas. They must have them. Thousands of new photoplays are produced each year—and production increases yearly.

No doubt right at this minute you have a good idea or plot in your head that would make a good "movie." Perhaps you have many, but are under the impression that it needs special talent to write scenarios. Dismiss that wrong idea because it is costing you money—possibly preventing you making big money and a name for yourself.

The Secret of Selling Scenarios

Just as the lawyer prepares his "briefs" in legal language so it is necessary for you to follow the "technique" or style and language of the photoplay studio in submitting your plots. Correct technique enables the Editor to "get" your plot at a glance. You can quickly master the art of writing scenarios with the help of "PHOTOPLAY WRITING"—an up-to-date and simplified course of instruction. This course will enable you to sell your photoplay ideas. It covers all the fundamentals of scenario requirements. Send for descriptive booklet. It's free.

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your free booklet describing course
of instruction in Photoplay Writing.

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*The Adventures
of
Captain Henry Hale*

A TALE *of* TREASURE
and PIRACY

By John Fleming Wilson

*Author of "The Man Who Came Back,"
"The Princess of Sorry Valley," etc*

Illustrated by GEORGE E. WOLFE

COMMENCES IN THE
MARCH MUNSEY

On Sale at all News-stands—25 Cents

A GOOD FLORIDA (17c) LUNCHEON

Along about Christmas time a little town in Florida held a Farmers' Rally, and the Club-women were able to give the 500 persons in attendance a splendid Noon-luncheon, according to press reports—for 17 cents per plate. Most of the articles appearing on the Menu were *home-grown*.

The High-Cost-of-Living today is bearing down most heavily on salaried folks—office managers, clerks, professional men, and others of that class. According to Bradstreet's, living costs stood last December at 131 per cent above pre-war level. Profiteering, extravagance and inflation of the currency all have their effect, but the real, fundamental, underlying cause of our troubles is **UNDER-PRODUCTION**.

Florida growers, however, need worry but little about their own living costs, when you consider the big prices they receive for luxuries shipped north in mid-winter. The Christmas strawberries brought them from 90c to \$1.00 and as high as \$1.46 per quart, after shipping and selling expenses were paid. In December Green String Beans brought close to \$6.00 per hamper in New York. Tomatoes shipped to Northern markets brought \$2.75 to \$4.00 per crate, and Peppers, \$3.25.

The Leesburg Commercial states: "We visited a twelve-acre farm Saturday—ten acres in fruit and the crop sold on the trees this season for \$10,000 cash. Cost of production was \$1,100, leaving \$8,900 for interest on the investment—nearly 18 per cent on a value of \$5,000 per acre."

These are not "Pipe Dreams"; they are **Florida Facts**. Grove land that is at present in an uncultivated state will not last forever in Florida—note the lesson of California. I own and am offering for sale in Orange County some of the finest orange and trucking lands in the state.

Truck gardeners near Orlando cleared as high as \$1,500 an acre from head lettuce last year. We have copies of their signed testimonial letters in our book. Many of these truck gardeners are Northern men and they know our summer climate is cool and more pleasant than in Northern states.

Here is **OPPORTUNITY** reduced to its simplest terms. All you need is a moderate amount of capital and a little knowledge of farming. We will clear and cultivate your land on our fair and equitable **TEN PER CENT ABOVE COST PLAN**. Send for our Big Free Book—**TWENTY ACRES AND PLENTY**. It tells all about our dollar-an-acre monthly payments, sick and out of work clauses and other attractive features. Address Sylvester E. Wilson, Dept. M2, Orlando, Florida.

(NOTE: Mr. Wilson is Treasurer and principal owner of the Produce Reporter Company, Chicago, publishers of the "Blue Book," which is to the Fruit and Produce Trade what Dun's and Bradstreet are in other commercial fields.)



A Wife Too Many

Into the hotel lobby walked a beautiful woman and a distinguished man. Little indeed did the gay and gallant crowd know that around these heads there flew stories of terror—of murder—and treason. That on their entrance, half a dozen detectives sprang up from different parts of the place.

Because of them the lights of the War Department in Washington blazed far into the night. With their fate was wound the tragedy of a broken marriage, of a fortune lost, of a nation betrayed.

It is a wonderful story with the kind of mystery that you will sit up nights trying to fathom. It is just one of the stories fashioned by that master of mystery

CRAIG KENNEDY

The American Sherlock Holmes

ARTHUR B. REEVE

The American Conan Doyle

He is the detective genius of our age. He has taken science—science that stands for this age—and allied it to the mystery and romance of detective fiction. Even to the smallest detail, every bit of the plot is worked out scientifically. For nearly ten years, America has been watching his Craig Kennedy—marvelling at the strange, new, startling things that detective hero would unfold.

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10 Volumes

To those who send the coupon promptly, we will give FREE a set of Edgar Allan Poe's works in 10 volumes.

When the police of New York failed to solve one of the most fearful murder mysteries of the time, Edgar Allan Poe—far off in Paris—found the solution.

The story is in these volumes.

In England and France, Edgar Allan Poe is held to be the greatest writer that America has produced. To them he is the great American classic.

This is a wonderful combination. Here are two of the greatest writers of mystery and scientific detective stories. You can get the Reeve at a remarkable low price and the Poe FREE for a short time only. Sign and mail the coupon now.

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Send me, all charges prepaid, set of Arthur B. Reeve—in 10 volumes. Also send me, absolutely free, the set of Edgar Allan Poe—in 10 volumes. If the books are not satisfactory I will return both sets within 10 days at your expense. Otherwise I will send you \$1 within 5 days and \$2 a month for 14 months.

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Address.....

Occupation.....



A Bigger Job Yours—If You Master Traffic Management

Reconstruction work to be done in Europe and expansion of our foreign trade means a greater demand than ever before for men trained as traffic experts. Great plants working overtime—raw materials shipped in—finished products shipped out—carloads, trainloads, shiploads, going North, East, South, West—contracts placed not on price basis, but for quick delivery—that is the condition we are facing.

"We must have efficient traffic men" say manufacturers, jobbers, railroads, ship owners. Hundreds are needed where one is available. This is the chance for ambitious men to rise to higher positions—to get into an uncrowded calling—to have the specialized knowledge which commands big salaries.

Train by Mail Under LaSalle Experts

This opportunity is yours now. Train while you hold your present job. Only your spare time required to become proficient in every branch of traffic.

Learn from men who have held or are among those now holding the highest positions in the field. Get practical training—the training which equips you to step into one of the highest places. This is what the LaSalle experts offer you.

They will explain every point concerning Freight Rates, Classifications, Tariffs, Bills of Lading, Routing, Claims, Demurrage, Express Rates, Ocean Traffic, R. R. Organization, Regulation and Management, Laws of Carriers, Interstate Commerce Rulings, etc. etc.

How many men are expert on even one of these subjects? You will be made proficient in all.

And here is something more—your enrollment gives you free the privileges of our Business Consulting Service. This means advice from our staff whenever you need help on any special business problem.

Over 950 people here—450 business experts among them—are ready to put you

on the road that leads directly to advancement. Get the complete, combined experience of many authorities, all given in easily understood form.

No Large Fees

The total cost is small. Your increase in earnings will soon pay it (see in next column what McMullen, Wright and other members say). Then also you can pay on easy terms—a little each month if you wish. No hardship in getting this training. Any man can afford it. And the time is now—when the great movement in business is beginning. Give a few hours weekly of your spare time for a few months—and get a larger salary.

Send the Coupon and Get All the Facts

Your request will bring complete information. We will tell you just what the course offers in every detail; all about the opportunities open to trained traffic men. We will also send you our book, "Ten Years Promotion in One," which has shown thousands of men the short road to promotion. If you are ambitious to rise—if you want to enter a paying and uncrowded field of business, get these facts. Sending the coupon implies no obligation upon you. Mail it today.

B. S. McMullen was a freight checker on the docks at Seattle.

Two years after beginning the LaSalle Course in Interstate Commerce and Traffic Management he was appointed General Freight and Passenger Agent.

He said that it would probably have taken him 3 or 10 years to make this advance if he had depended merely upon work and experience.

LaSalle experts helped him to reach the top in the space of months.

T. J. Wright, an Illinois member, reports three promotions since taking the course.

H. S. Watson, of Michigan, figures his increased earning capacity at 400 per cent.

Fred Hoffman, an Ohio member, reports 500 per cent profit on his investment in one year.

Among the many LaSalle trained men who are now Traffic Managers or Experts on Interstate Commerce are:

Wm. Ritchie, Vice-President and Traffic Manager, Philadelphia Lawn Mower Co.

F. E. Combs, Traffic Director, Twin City Traffic League, Benton Harbor, Michigan.

F. E. Hamilton, Traffic Manager, Retail Merchants Association of Canada.

Mr. Hamilton says: "I cannot speak too highly of this institution. The course is up-to-date, authentic, and easily understood. My only regret is that I did not take it up five years ago."

The success these men have made can be paralleled by any other ambitious man who will do as they did—train!

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY

"The Largest Business Training Institution in the World"

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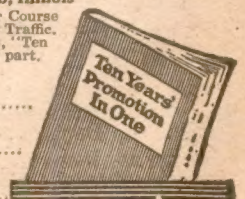
Chicago, Illinois

Please send me your catalog and full information on your Course and Consulting Service in Interstate Commerce and Railway Traffic. Also a copy of your valuable book for the ambitious man, "Ten Years' Promotion In One." This without obligation on my part.

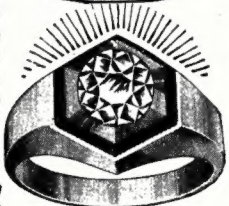
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A Nevada customer writes: "My first purchase, a \$136.00 diamond, appraised at \$200.00. . . . Sold it for \$185.00. Next purchase an absolutely flawless diamond for my wife. Thanks for goods that are more than expected."—*Full name on request.*

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This nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ century old house, in the diamond banking business, rated at more than \$1,000,000.00, lends money on diamonds and high grade jewels. We have an extremely large number of diamonds to offer far below full market prices. We send to you absolutely free on approval to examine and have valued by any expert you wish. Then try to match at 60% more, that's our challenge.

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"The \$69 and \$75 rings I received from you I could not duplicate here for double your price and I could sell them for more than I paid you." R. C.—, Marion, Indiana.

\$105.00 Extra Value

"You have a life customer in me. My \$45 cluster ring you sent is valued here at \$150.00." M. H. B.—, Ardmore, Okl.

Full names on request. These are only specimens of the hundreds of letters we receive from customers delighted with their wonderful bargains.

Saved Me \$40.00

"The \$35 diamond ring is a beauty. Could not have bought one here like it for less than \$75.00." A. D.—, Iron Mountain, Mich.

\$75.00 Ring Appraised at \$162.00

"The stone I bought of you for \$75 I could not duplicate for less than \$162.00. I am delighted." F. L.—, Hope, Arkansas.

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Send your name and address for our wonderful lists and bulletins of amazing bargains. Radically different from any regular catalog. You can't begin to realize the fine values and wonderful savings until you see for yourself. Every jewel accurately described in detail. You have the opportunity free to verify everything before you buy. Write for these marvelous lists of diamond bargains—sent free—no obligations. Our guaranteed loans like insurance policies—ask about them.

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*References by permission—Bank of Pittsburgh, N. A., Marine National Bank, Union Trust Company, Pittsburgh, Pa.
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Brings This
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*He'll be happy in this
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A splendid value. We send you the complete outfit for only \$1.00 down. If for any reason whatever you don't wish to keep it send it right back and your money will be returned instantly. Don't miss this opportunity. Order now while this offer is open.

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1 Double Breasted Norfolk Suit 1 Stylish Scotch Golf Cap
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Our "World Beater" Suit is all that its name means. Dependable fabrics, perfectly made, stylish and at the same time will wear like iron. Made in newest double breasted style. Pleated back with yoke and belt all around. Coat strongly lined with twilled serge. Knickers full lined. Comes in fancy wool mixed Cassimeres in Blue, Brown, Green or Gray. Sizes 8 to 17.

Stylish Golf Cap—Made of imported Scotch plaids. Large visor fastens with snap. Leather sweat band.

Fancy Striped Waist—Made from durable, washable Percalé. Perfect fitting yoke back. Outside pocket—cuff to button.

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Pocket Handkerchief—Made of soft, good quality lawn with pretty fancy border.

Boys' Club Button with Every Suit

Be sure to give size of cap, also size and color of suit.
Order by No. S-10. Send only \$1.00 with the coupon.
Terms \$3.50 monthly. Total price \$21.95.

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Just a few cents a day buys this complete outfit.
No charge for the credit no matter where you live.
No discount for cash. All business men use their credit. Use yours. See for yourself the splendid values we give you. Mail the coupon today.

Order Now

There's only a limited quantity of these outfits. Don't be too late. Don't miss this splendid value. Remember, you take no risk. Mail the coupon with a \$1.00 P. O. order or a dollar bill. Send the coupon now.

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If I am not satisfied with the Boy's Outfit I can return it and get my payment back. Otherwise I will pay \$3.50 monthly until \$21.95 has been paid.

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